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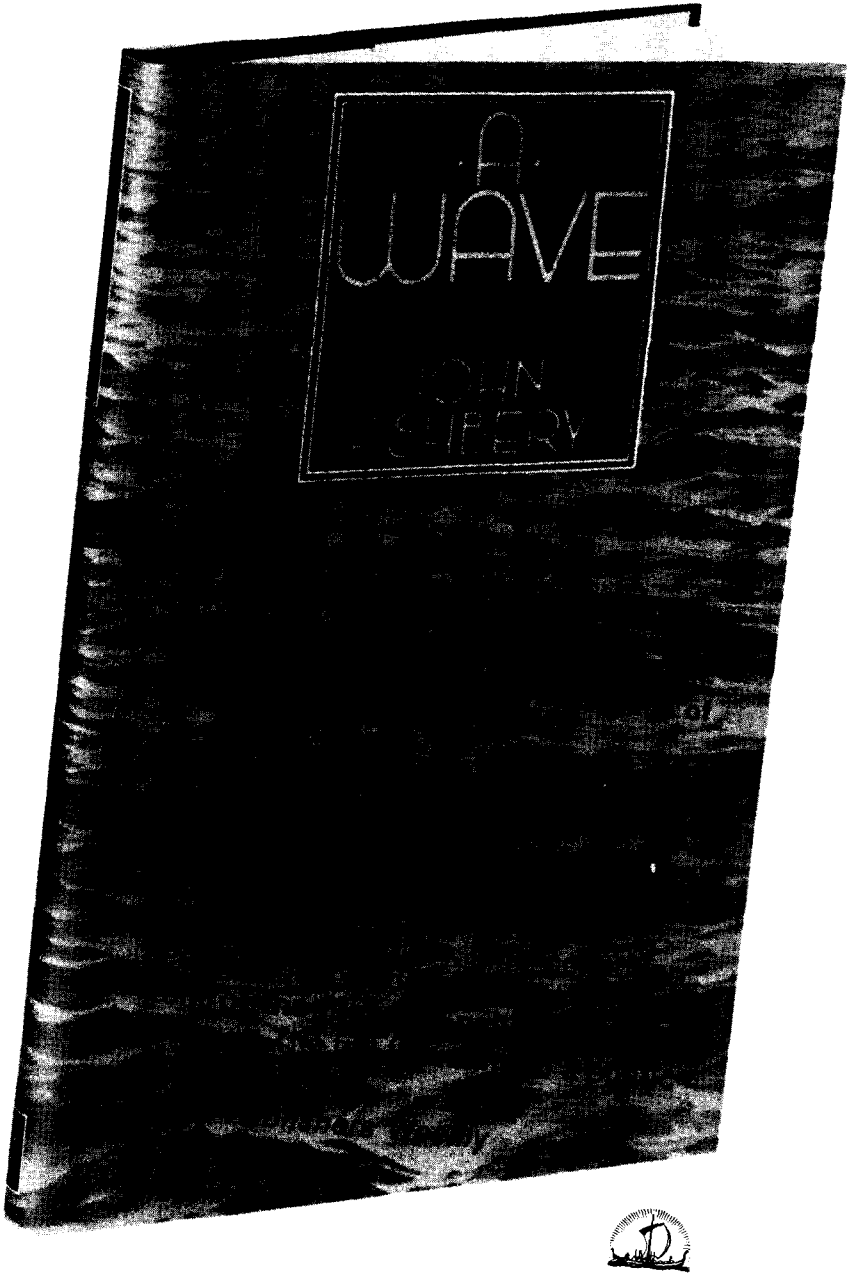

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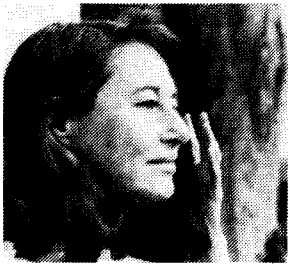

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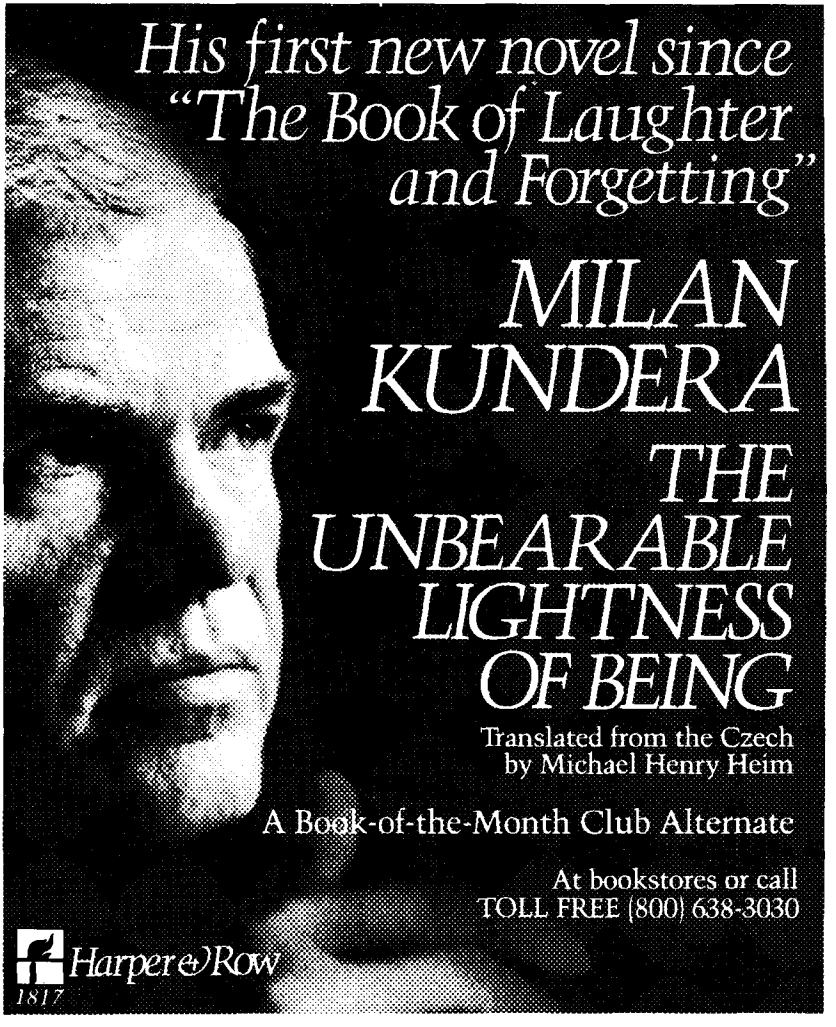

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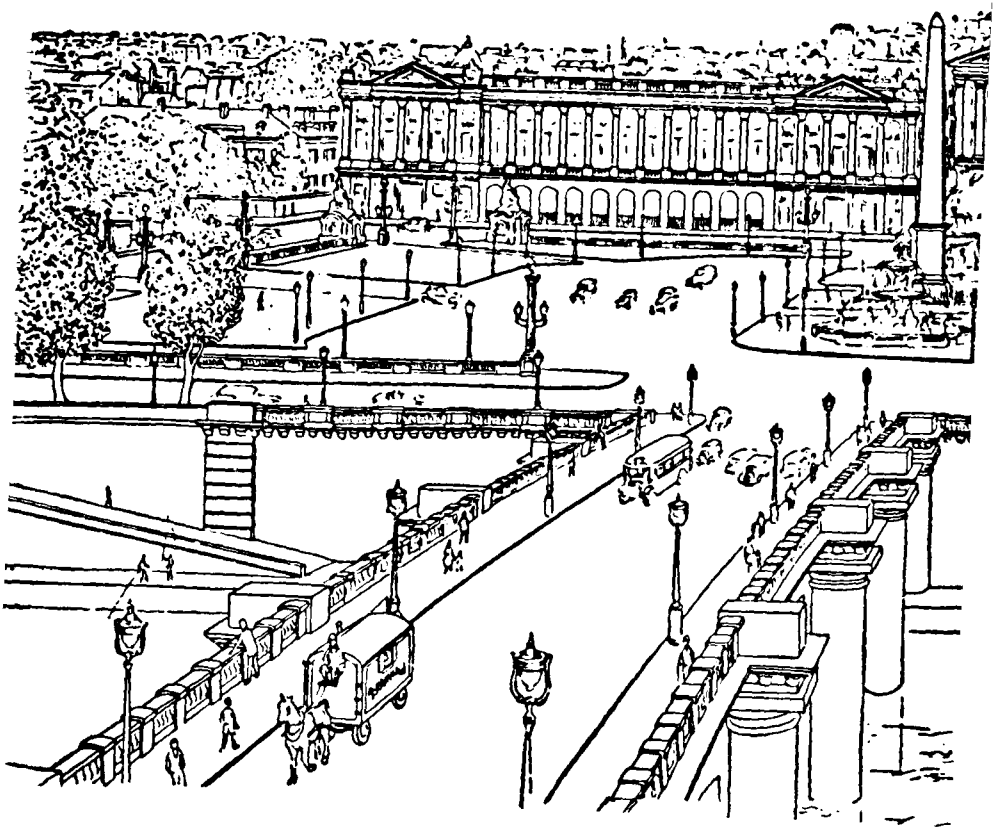

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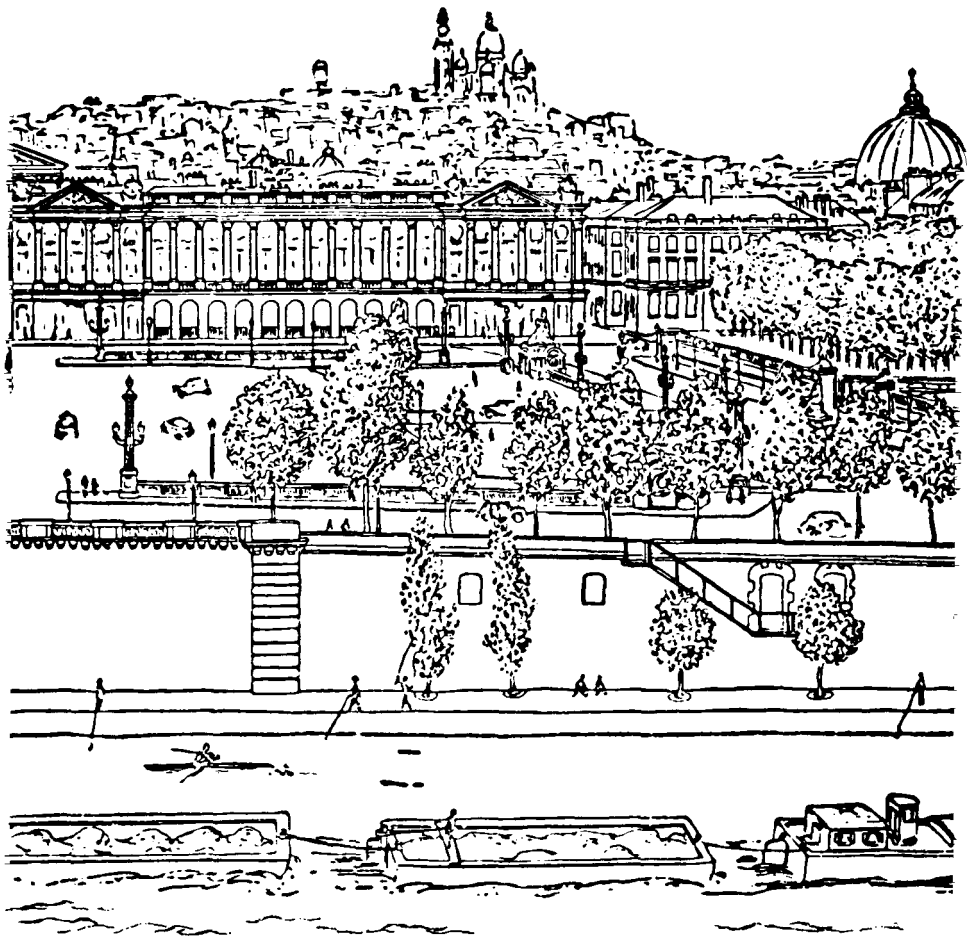

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We are pleased to announce that Mona Simpson, a Senior Editor of *The Paris Review*, has been chosen as a recipient of a Kellogg Foundation Fellowship for fiction writing.

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The Leather Man

E. L. Doctorow

They're nothing new, you can read about the Leather Man for instance, a hundred years ago making his circuit through Westchester, Connecticut, into the Berkshires in the summer, seen sitting on the roadside, glimpsed in the woods, he had these regular stops, caves, abandoned barns, riverbanks under the iron bridges in mill towns, the Leather Man, a hulk, colossally dressed, in layers of coats and shawls and pants, all topped with a stiff handfashioned leather outer armor, like a knight's, and a homemade pointed hat of leather, he was ten feet tall, an apparition. Of course it's the essence of these people that they're shy, they scurry at the sign of confrontation, never hurt a soul. But it was said of this fellow that when cornered he would engage in quite rational conversation, unlearned of course, with no reference to current events, and perhaps with a singular line of association that might strike one at times as not sequential, not really reasonably sequential on first audit, but genial nonetheless, with transitions

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made by smile or the sincere struggle for words, even the act of talking one assumes is something you can lose the knack of. So there is a history. And though the country of western New England, or the farmlands in the north Midwest will still find one asleep in the plains, a patch of wheat flattened in his contours, say, and although they're common enough in the big cities, living in doorways, wiping your windshields with a dirty rag for a quarter, men, or the baggers, smoking butts from the gutters, women, or the communities of them, living each in a private alcove underground between subway stations, in the nests of the walls alongside tracks, or down under the tracks in the hollows and nooks of the electric cable conduits, what is new is the connection they're making with each other, some kind of spontaneous communication has flashed them into awareness of each other, and hell they may as well have applied to the National Endowment as a living art form, there is someone running them but I don't know who.

I don't know who and I don't know why. Conceivably it's a harmless social phenomenon, like all the other forms of suffering, that is to say not planned for a purpose but merely a natural function of everything else going, and maybe it is heartless to look askance at suffering, to be suspicious of it, southern church blacks, welfare recipients, jobless kids around the pool halls and so on, but that's the job, that's our role, I don't think I have to justify it. We know how danger grows, or for that matter large intangible events, spiritual events, there were five six hundred thousand, yes? at that farmer's field twenty years ago, and fifty of them were us, you remember, one part per ten thousand, like the legal chemistry for a preservative, one part per ten thousand to keep the thing from turning bad. I was there myself and enjoyed the music. My favorite was Joan C. Baez, the most conservative of musicians, ultra-liberal pacifist peacenik, remember peaceniks? That was a coining we did ourselves and gave it to some columnist in Denver I think it was, spread like wildfire. But she sang nice, early in the game, everyone stoned on sun, chemical toilets still operative . . .

We found a girl there, incidentally, who was doing these

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strange spastic pantomimes that drew a real crowd. Beginning with her arms over her head. Brought her elbows down over the boobs, seemed to push the elbows out, pushing at something, and then one arm went around the back of the neck, and then all these gyrations of the head, it was the weirdest thing as if she was caught in something, a web, a net, so intense, so concentrated, the crowd, the music disappeared, and then she went down on her knees and knelt through her arms like they were some kind of jump rope, and then when her arms were behind her that was not right, she tried to get out that way, get out, she was getting out of something, enacting the attempt face all twisted and red to get out, you see. So we took some pictures, and then we diagrammed the action and what we came up with was very interesting, it was someone in a straitjacket, it was the classic terror enacted of someone straitjacketed and trying to break free. Now who can you think of, the person who in fact could do that, the person who could get out of straitjackets, who was that, he said.

Houdini.

That's right, Houdini, the escape artist, it was one of his routines, getting out of the kind of straitjacket that breaks the heart.

To do hermitage, the preference for one's own company. Picture yourself in such solitude, in natural surroundings, say, the classical version. Build a hut in the woods, split your own logs, grow things, ritualize daily subsistence, listen to the wind sing, watch the treetops dance, feel the weather, feel yourself in touch with the way things are. You remember your Thoreau. There's a definite poetical component to avoiding all other human beings and taking on the coloration of your surroundings, invisible as the toad on the log. Whatever the spirtual content, it is the action of hiding out, you see, these guys hide out. So the question is why? It may be a normal life directed by powerful paranoidal impulses, or it may be a paranoid life that makes sense given the particular individual's background. But something has happened. If he is hiding I want to know why.

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But supposing on the other hand we all seek to impose the order we can manage, the more public the order the better we are known. Politicians are known. Artists are known. They impose public order. But say you are some hapless fellow, you can't keep a job, your wife nags, the children are vicious, the neighbors snigger. Down in your basement though you make nice things of wood. You make a bookshelf, you make a cabinet, sawing and planing, sanding, fitting, glueing, and you construct something very fine, you impose that order, that is the realm of your control. You make a bigger cabinet. You make a cabinet you can walk into. You build it where nobody will watch you. When it is done you walk inside and lock the door.

Before we break for lunch let me propose this idea. You have them walking into their boxes and locking the door behind them. Fine. But two people do that and you have a community. You see what I'm saying? You can make a revolution with people who have nothing to do with each other at the same time. There is a theory for instance that the universe oscillates. It is not a steady beaming thing, nor did it start with a bang. It expands and contracts, inhales and exhales, it is either growing larger than you can imagine or imploding toward a point. The crucial thing is its direction. If things come apart enough, they will have started to come together.

0001. Members of the class: feral children, hermits, street people, gamblers, prisoners, missing persons, forest fire wardens, freaks, permanent invalids, recluses, autistics, road tramps, the sensory deprived. (See also astronauts.)

We borrowed an ordinary precinct car and went looking for one. Contact on Fourteenth Street and Avenue A, time of contact ten thirteen P.M. Subject going east on southside Fourteenth Street. White, female indeterminate age. Wearing WW II issue khaki greatcoat over several dresses, gray fedora over blue watch cap, several shawls, some kind of furred shoes overlaid with galoshes. Stockings rolled to ankles over

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stockings. Pushing two-wheeled grocery cart stuffed with bags, sacks, rags, soft goods, broken umbrellas. Purposeful movements. Subject went directly from public trash receptacles to private trash deposits in doorways, seemed interested in anything made of cloth. Subject sat down to rest back to fence East Fifteenth Street. This is the site of Consolidated Edison generating plant. Subject slept several hours on sidewalk in twenty degree weather. At four A.M. awakened by white male derelict urinating on her.

Bancroft suggests as an organizing principle we make the distinction between simple and profound dereliction. Ignore bums in the pokey and the poor slobs who shoot up. Always the snob, Bancroft. He wants only middle-class and above material? Still there's something to be said: If the brain is overrun where is the act of separation? If nothing is excluded the significance is lost. Interesting he designates as profound that which is incomplete.

In the city of New Rochelle, NY, a man was apprehended as a peeping tom. He'd been found in the landscaping behind the residence of Mr. and Mrs. Morris Wakefield, 19 Croft Terrace. He had the aspect of a wild man, bearded, unkempt, ragged. Reported to have been glimpsed several times over a period of months in back yards of the better neighborhoods of the city. No identification.

Slater sat up and took notice. The incident had so shocked Mrs. Morris Wakefield that she had been placed under sedation. Poor woman was in no shape. Already under severe stress as a result of the disappearance of her husband, Morris Wakefield a partner in a bridge construction firm, an engineer of considerable reputation in his field, no known enemies. Exemplary life. Gone. The couple was childless. They had been married twelve years. We went up there. Alone and grieving in her home, Mrs. Wakefield had prepared for bed and came downstairs in her negligee for a glass of warm milk. Two eerie eyes rolled along the rim of the windowsill. She screamed and ran upstairs and locked herself in her bedroom

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where she phoned the police. I find, not infrequently, quote New Rochelle Police detective Leo Kreisler, trouble breaks out in a rash, we have people in our community we have no dealings with for twenty years, and suddenly everything goes at once, someone is robbed, then hurt in a car a week later, or someone is beat up and a relative steals money, and just like that one family is in multiple crisis in the space of a few days. We asked to see him. Sure why not, quote Detective Kreisler. Who knows maybe he'll like you. He doesn't talk, he doesn't eat, he looks at you like he's thinking of something else.

The prisoner wore floppy chino slacks torn down one leg and belted with a piece of clothesline, dirty white Stan Smith tennis sneakers, no socks, a stained and greasy work shirt. He was not a trim person, but a person who looked formerly fat. Pants and shirt hung on him. Badly needed a haircut and in the fluorescent light of the slammer blinked with the weak eyes and pale doughy undereyes of a person who wears glasses without his glasses. His beard white although his matted hair reddish. He sat crosslegged on the vinyl floor. He sat with the fingers of his hands intertwined stiffly. Slater contemplated him. He was all connected, his legs crossed, his fingers laced. Under observation he raised his knees still crossed and roped his wrists around them his fingers still locked.

Slater: Are you in fact the owner of the property on which you were apprehended, the bridge engineer Morris Wakefield, the missing husband?

The peeper nodded yes.

An item from the files of the security department of National Dry Foods Corporation: One of their young marketing executives had been relocated from Short Hills, New Jersey, to Flint, Michigan. It was discovered sometime thereafter that in Flint he was living in domicile with a woman not his wife and two children not his children, although he represented them as such. Six months it took them to find his legal wife and two children still in place in their Short Hills, New Jersey home, but living in domicile with an executive of the company who had been relocated from Flint. The two executives

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had been fraternity brothers at Duke University.

Slater, do you fuck around?

A long time before answering. No.

So do I. Let me tell you about the lunch I had yesterday. A very beautiful lady whom I've had my eye on for years. She and my wife are pals, they go to the galleries together. Well we were all at this party and I make a joke, a signal joke, clearly funny if she doesn't pick up on it but a signal in case she wants to. Is that how you do it?

No, I usually come right out with it.

Well I'm older than you are. I'm a different generation. Wit counts for me, the double entendre. So we had lunch. I could hardly hold her down. She was ready to avenge fifteen years of faithful marriage. Not only that her husband cheated on her but that he was nasty at home. Not only that he was nasty and mean, but that he had no respect for what she did and made fun of the causes she supported. Not only that he lacked respect but that he was infantile and went all to pieces when he cut himself shaving. And not only that, but that he spent no time with the children and complained when he had to shell out money for their school.

Slater smiled.

Oh god, it was uncanny. Like she had held a mirror up. I found myself getting defensive, wanting to argue. It finally comes down to a smile, a small kindness, a bit of good cheer she said. Those are the important things. Your husband is a cheerful man, I said, and by this time in the conversation I didn't want to have anything more to do with her. An amiable charming man I said with a good sense of humor. Oh yes, she said, so was Dr. Jekyll.

What is the essential act of the Leather Man? He makes the world foreign. He distances it. He is estranged. Our perceptions are sharpest when we're estranged. We can see the shape of things. Do you accept this as a principle? All right then, consider something as common as philandering. I'm an old-fashioned fellow and I use old-fashioned words. After a while your marriage becomes your cover. Don't laugh, I'm quite se-

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rious. Your feelings are broken down by plurality, you don't stop, you keep moving, it becomes your true life to keep moving, to emotionally keep moving, you find finally the emotion in the movement. You are the Leather Man, totally estranged from your society, the prettiest women are rocks in the stream, flowers along the road, you have subverted your own life and live alone in the wild, your only companion your thoughts.

I think what I'm proposing is a structure, not a theory of a subversive class, but an infrastructure of layered subversion, perhaps not conspiracy at all. That something has happened like a rearrangement of molecules, and that since we are political persons here we are sensitive to the crude politics of it, we think of it as some sort of ground for antisocial action when it might not be that at all. So I'm saying the way to understand it for our particular purposes might be not the usual thing of getting inside, penetration, but distance, putting it away from us, getting as far from it as possible to see what it really is. Because if it has gotten outside us, and we're inside and we can't see the shape of it, it comes to us as reality and it has no meaning at all.

We've got this astronaut who went bad, James C. Montgomery who took a hero's welcome in 1966 and since then has been picked up for stock fraud, embezzlement, forgery, drunken driving, you name it he's done it, stealing cars, assault, assault with a deadly weapon. This sometimes happens to individuals in whom history intensifies like electroshock, leaves them all scattered afterwards. We've got him quiet now but his wife keeps talking to reporters down in Florida and threatens suit.

I'll read you part of the interrogation by one of the staff psychiatrists:

Were you ever frightened? Did anything happen on the mission you didn't report?

No sir.

Did anything unexpected happen?

No sir.

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Did the idea of space hold any terror for you? Being out there so far from home?

Question repeated.

No, well, you do your job, you're busy as hell, there's no time to think. And you're always in touch, almost always in touch, control voice in the empyrean void. No, I would say not. (Pause.) You just keep your nose to the panel. Make community with the switches, little lights. Everything around you is man-made, you have that assurance. (Pause.) American made.

But then you did the landing, right?

Yes sir.

You walked.

Yes sir.

You got out of the machine and walked around.

Yes sir. Oh—for a while there I was alone and miserable inside my space suit. Is that what you mean?

I have the feeling you're trying to tell me what you think I want to hear.

Well shit. (Pause.) Look, the truth is I don't remember. I mean I remember that I walked on the moon but now I can see it on television and I don't feel it, you know what I mean? I can't believe it happened. I see myself, that I did it, but I don't remember how it felt, I don't remember the experience of it.

Can I just try a quick simple experiment here? Five minutes of your time? Silence. Slater looked around the table. Someone lit a pipe. The grudging tribal assent. I'm going to give you a list of simple nouns and ask you to respond—just fill me in on what's happening. All right?

Night. Ladder. Window. Scream. Penis.

Have you been talking to my wife, someone said. Everyone laughed.

Patrol. Mud. Flare. Mortar.

All right, someone said.

President. Crowd. Bullet. Slater said. We've got thousands of people in this country whose vocation it is to let us know

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what our experience is. Are you telling me this is not a resource?

Slate, we're going to have a fight on our hands if you want to admit that kind of material. You don't know the minds you're dealing with. They're not going to understand, they're going to read it as source. Then you know how messy it'll get? You're going to have to interrogate these resources, the most articulate people in the land, the ones who already have their hackles up and you're going to ask them where they got their information?

No, you're not hearing me, Slater said. We'll know where they got their information. We gave it to them.

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Memos Re Mrs. R. (1)

Walking by the rough sea & huge > to work the telescope. The man of course comes to the rescue, hits it & Joan the POV one the kiss > waves & he says "It is what you wanted..." & as he continues to look she sees her dreams wishes etc. in the Joan & Joan & foam back to reality as she comes to he is still there..."

Cut to very Sedate Tea-Room Cakes. Gateau Basque He is ready to Choc. mean out

Mrs L. No. No... No.

Last Lines. And what do you want now Mrs L? I want you to walk home with me as if the last three Mrs L what is it Sir? It is. Their faces on the Wave.

An Edna O'Brien manuscript page.

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The Art of Fiction LXXXII
Edna O'Brien

Edna O'Brien was born in the west of Ireland in a small village she describes as "enclosed, fervid, and bigoted." Literature was taboo, and those books that penetrated the parish were loaned by the page. O'Brien's father was a farmer who "carried on in that glorious line of profligate Irishmen." Her mother, who had worked as a maid in Brooklyn, always yearned to return to America. O'Brien's childhood was unhappy, but she believes it gave her both the need and the impetus to write. "Writing," she says, "is the product of a deeply disturbed psyche, and by no means therapeutic."

After finishing primary school in her local village, O'Brien

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was sent to convent school in Galway, and later to Dublin where she studied at the Pharmaceutical College and worked in a chemist's shop. During this time, she met and married Ernst Gabler, a novelist, with whom she had two sons. (The marriage was dissolved ten years later.) In 1960, the family moved to London, where O'Brien began to write.

O'Brien's first novel, The Country Girls, *was published in 1961. It is the story of two girls who grow up in the Irish countryside, attend a convent school (from which they are expelled), and journey to Dublin and London in search of love and adventure. O'Brien's subsequent novels*—The Lonely Girl, Girls in Their Married Bliss, August is a Wicked Month, *and* Night—*further explore the relationship between the sexes, often from the point of view of women who lose themselves in love, and later must struggle to regain their sovereignty. O'Brien has also written two plays, three screenplays, and several collections of short stories, all of which contribute to her reputation as one of Ireland's foremost women of letters. Her latest play,* Virginia, *based on the life of Virginia Woolf, was produced in London last year to critical acclaim. It is due to open in New York this autumn at Joseph Papp's Public Theater, with Kate Nelligan in the title role.*

Now in her forties, O'Brien resembles one of her own heroines: beautiful in a subtle, wistful way, with reddish-blond hair, green eyes, and a savage sense of humor. She lives alone in an airy, spacious apartment in Little Venice, London, near the Canal. From her balcony, wrought-iron steps lead down to a vast tree-filled park where O'Brien often can be found strolling during breaks from her work. The following interview took place in her writing room—a large, comfortable study cluttered with books, notebooks, records, and periodicals. The day I was there, the room was warmed by a log fire burning in the fireplace, and even more so by O'Brien's rich, softly accented Irish voice.

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INTERVIEWER

You once said that as far back as you can remember you have been a writer. At what point did you actually start writing literature?

EDNA O'BRIEN

When I say I have written from the beginning, I mean that all real writers write from the beginning, that the vocation, the obsession, is already there, and that the obsession derives from an intensity of feeling which normal life cannot accommodate. I started writing snippets when I was eight or nine, but I wrote my first novel when I left Ireland and came to live in London. I had never been outside Ireland and it was November when I arrived in England. I found everything so different, so *alien.* Waterloo Station was full of people who were nameless, faceless. There were wreaths on the Cenotaph for Remembrance Sunday, and I felt bewildered and lost—an outsider. So in a sense *The Country Girls*, which I wrote in those first few weeks after my arrival, was my experience of Ireland and my farewell to it. But something happened to my style which I will tell you about. I had been trying to write short bits, and these were always flowery and over-lyrical. Shortly after I arrived in London I saw an advertisement for a lecture given by Arthur Mizener [author of a book on F. Scott Fitzgerald, *The Far Side Of Paradise*] on Hemingway and Fitzgerald. You must remember that I had no literary education, but a fervid religious one. So I went to the lecture and it was like a thunderbolt—Saul of Tarsus on his horse! Mizener read out the first paragraph of *Farewell to Arms* and I couldn't believe it—this totally uncluttered, precise, true prose, which was *also* very moving and lyrical. I can say that the two things came together then: my being ready for the revelation and my urgency to write. The novel *wrote itself*, so to speak, in a few weeks. All the time I was writing it I couldn't stop crying, although it is a fairly buoyant, funny book. But it was the separation from Ireland which brought me to the point where I *had* to write, though I had always been in love with literature.

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INTERVIEWER

If you had always loved literature, why did you study chemistry at university rather than English?

O'BRIEN

The usual reason, family. My family was radically opposed to anything to do with literature. Although Ireland has produced so many great writers, there is a deep suspicion about writing there. Somehow they know that writing is dangerous, seditious, as if "In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word *was* God." I was an obedient little girl—though I hate to admit it now!—and went along with my family's wishes. I worked in a chemist's shop and then studied at the Pharmaceutical College at night.

INTERVIEWER

The protagonist of *The Country Girls* also works in a shop. Is the novel autobiographical?

O'BRIEN

The novel is autobiographical in so far as I was born and bred in the west of Ireland, educated at a convent, and was full of romantic yearnings, coupled with a sense of outrage. But any book that is any good must be, to some extent, autobiographical, because one cannot and should not fabricate emotions; and although style and narrative are crucial, the bulwark, emotion is what finally matters. With luck, talent, and studiousness, one manages to make a little pearl, or egg, or something. . . . But what gives birth to it is what happens inside the soul and the mind, and that has almost always to do with *conflict.* And loss—an innate sense of tragedy.

INTERVIEWER

What Thomas Hardy called "the sadness of things," and Unamuno "el sentimiento tragico de la vida"?

O'BRIEN

Precisely. Not just subjective sadness, though you have to

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experience it in order to know it, but also objective. And the more I read about writers, their letters—say Flaubert's—the more I realize it. Flaubert was in a way like a *woman*. There he was, in Rouen, yearning for the bright lights of Paris and *hectic affairs, yet deliberately keeping away from all that*, isolating himself, in order to burn and luxuriate in the affliction of his own emotions. So writing, I think, is an interestingly perverse occupation. It is quite sick in the sense of normal human enjoyment of life, because the writer is always *removed*, the way an actor never is. An actor is with the audience, a writer is not with his readers, and by the time the work appears, he or she is again incarcerated in the next book—or in barrenness. So for both men and women writers, writing is an eminently masochistic exercise—though I wonder what Norman Mailer would say to that!

INTERVIEWER

Doesn't the theory of masochism apply to all artists, whatever the art form?

O'BRIEN

To some extent. I was reading Van Gogh's letters. My God! I'm surprised he cut off only *one* ear, that he wasn't altogether shredded in pieces! But a woman writer has a double dose of masochism: the masochism of the woman and that of the artist. No way to dodge it or escape from it. Men are better at escaping their psyches and their consciences. But there is a certain dogged strength in realizing that you can make those delirious journeys and come through.

INTERVIEWER

Some don't. There is a high rate of suicide, alcoholism, madness among writers.

O'BRIEN

It is only by the grace of God, and perhaps willpower, that one comes through each time. Many wonderful writers write one or two books and then kill themselves. Sylvia Plath for

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instance. She was much younger than Virginia Woolf when she committed suicide, but if she had survived that terrible crisis, I feel she would have written better books. I have this theory that Woolf feared that the flame of her talent was extinguished or dwindling because her last book, *Between The Acts*, lacked the soaring genius of the others. When a writer, or an artist, has the feeling that he can't do it anymore, he descends into hell. So you must keep in mind that although it may stop, it can come back. When I was a child in Ireland, a spring would suddenly appear and yield forth buckets of beautiful clear water, then just as suddenly it would dry up. The water-diviners would come with their rods and sometimes another spring would be found. One has to be one's own water-diviner. It is hard, especially as writers are always anxious, always on the run—from the telephone, from people, from responsibilities, from the distractions of this world. The other thing that can destroy talent is too much grief. Yeats said, "Too much sorrow can make a stone of the heart." I often wonder, if Emily Brontë had lived to be fifty, what kind of books would she have written? Her life was so penalizing—and Charlotte's too—utterly without sex. Emily was thirty when she wrote *Wuthering Heights*. I think the grinding suffering might have killed her talent later. It is not that you have to be happy—that would be asking too much—but if it gets too painful that sense of wonderment, or joy, dies, and with it the generosity so necessary to create.

INTERVIEWER

So the catalyst for your own work was that lecture on Fitzgerald and Hemingway. Before that you said that you read a great deal in Ireland, partly to escape. What sort of books did you read? And which ones influenced you most?

O'BRIEN

Looking back on it, it was not so much escape as nourishment. Of course there is an element of escape as well, that entering temporarily into a different world. But I think literature is food for the soul and the heart. There are books that

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are pure escapism: thrillers, detective and spy novels, but I can't read them, because they don't *deliver* to me. Whereas from one page of Dostoyevsky I feel renewed, however depressing the subject. The first book I ever *bought*—I've still got it—was called *Introducing James Joyce*, by T. S. Eliot. It contained a short story, a piece from *Portrait of the Artist*, some other pieces, and an introduction by Eliot. I read a scene from *Portrait* which is the Christmas dinner when everything begins pleasantly: a fire, largesse, the blue flame of light on the dark plum pudding, the revelry before the flare-up ensues between people who were for Parnell and those who were against him. Parnell had been dead for a long time, but the Irish being Irish persist with history. Reading that book made me realize that I wanted literature for the rest of my life.

INTERVIEWER

And you became a ferocious reader, first of Joyce then of others. Who else did you read in those early days?

O'BRIEN

I am a slow reader, because I want to savor and recall what I read. The excitement and sense of discovery is not the same as in those days when I would get thoroughly wrapped up in *Vanity Fair* or *War and Peace*. Now I set myself a task of reading one great book each year. Last year I read *Bleak House*, which I think is the greatest English novel—I read a few pages a day. But one's taste changes so much. I mentioned Scott Fitzgerald, whom I read, oh, so lovingly and thoroughly! I loved *Tender Is The Night* and *The Great Gatsby*, which is a flawless novel. So I can say that he was one of my early influences. But now I know that fundamentally I respond to European literature in all its dark ramifications. I think the Russians are unsurpassable. Of course Joyce did something extraordinary: He threw out the entire heritage of English literature—language, story, structure, everything—and created a new and stupendous work. But for emotional gravity, no one can compare with the Russians. When I first read Chekhov's

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short stories, before I saw his plays, I knew I had heard the *voice* that I loved most in the whole world. I wrote to my sister, "Read Chekhov—he does not write, he *breathes* life off the page." And he was, and still is, my greatest influence, especially in short-story writing.

INTERVIEWER

Later on, when you tried your hand at drama, did Chekhov come to your rescue there as well?

O'BRIEN

I think so, though it is very dangerous to take Chekhov as a model. His dramatic genius is so mysterious; he does what seems to be the impossible, in that he makes dramatic something that is desultory. And of course it is not desultory—indeed, it is as tightly knit as that Persian carpet. Shakespeare is God. He knows everything and expresses it with such a density of poetry and humor and power that the mind boggles. But then he had *great* themes—*Othello*, *Hamlet*, the history plays. Chekhov, on the other hand, tells you, or seems to tell you, of a profligate family that is losing an orchard, or some sisters who yearn for Moscow, and inside it is a whole web of life and love and failure. I think that despite his emphasis on wanting to be funny, he was a tragic man. In a letter to his wife, actress Olga Knipper, he says, "It is nine o'clock in the evening, you are going to play act three of my play, and I am as lonely as a coffin!"

INTERVIEWER

The greatness of the Russian classics must be due in part to the vastness and variety of their country, the harshness of climate, and the cruelty and roughness of their society (which hasn't really changed) and which enhances the intensity of the emotions and the extremes of behavior.

O'BRIEN

Certainly. It makes for endurance—those long, savage winters. Also being throttled as they have always been. The

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more you strangle a man, the deeper he screams. Boris Pasternak put his pain to immortal use in *Dr. Zhivago.*

INTERVIEWER

Did that first book on Joyce send you to read the whole of Joyce?

O'BRIEN

Yes, but I was too young then. Later I read *Ulysses*, and at one point I thought of writing a book on Joyce, *comme tout le monde*! I read a lot of books about Joyce and wrote a monograph. Then I realized that there were already too many books on him and that the best thing you could read about Joyce was Joyce himself.

INTERVIEWER

How do you assess him now, and how is he regarded in Ireland?

O'BRIEN

He is beyond assessment—gigantic. I sometimes read bits of *Finnegans Wake* and feel my brain begin to sizzle. Joyce went mad with genius. When you read *Dubliners* and *Finnegans Wake* you feel that the man underwent a metamorphosis between twenty-five and sixty. H. G. Wells said that *Finnegans Wake* was an immense riddle, and people find it too difficult to read. I have yet to meet anyone who has read and digested the whole of it—except perhaps my friend Richard Ellmann. Joyce killed himself with exertion. He went beyond us into a labyrinth of language, and I don't know whether that was a loss or a gain.

INTERVIEWER

The generation before you in Ireland had an important literary scene: Yeats and Lady Gregory and the Abbey Theatre group, and all the people around them, which ran parallel to London's Bloomsbury group and Eliot's circle. Did you have anything similar in Ireland when you started?

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O'BRIEN

Nothing on that level. There was a sort of Irish literary scene but I wasn't part of it. One reason was poverty, another that I didn't have an *entrée*; I was just a chemistry student in a bed-sit. I heard of people like Sean O'Faolain, Frank O'Connor. Samuel Beckett had left and vowed never to return, Sean O'Casey was in England. But it was good for me not to be part of any scene because it meant that I had to do my apprenticeship alone. Sweet are the uses of adversity, are they not?

INTERVIEWER

What about women writers? You haven't mentioned any as a major influence so far.

O'BRIEN

Every woman novelist has been influenced by the Brontës. *Wuthering Heights* and *Jane Eyre*. The poetry of Emily Dickinson, the early books of Elizabeth Bowen—especially the one she wrote about her home in Ireland, *Bowen's Court*. My admiration for Jane Austen came much later, and I also love the Russian poet Anna Akhmatova. Nowadays there are too many writers, and I think one of the reasons for the deterioration of language and literature in the last forty years has been the spawning of inferior novels. Everybody writes novels—journalists, broadcasters, T.V. announcers . . . it is a free-for-all! But writing is a vocation, like being a nun or a priest. I work at my writing as an athlete does at his training, taking it very seriously. Whether a novel is autobiographical or not does not matter. What is important is the truth in it and the way that truth is expressed. I think a casual or frivolous attitude is pernicious.

INTERVIEWER

Is there any area of fiction that you find women are better equipped to explore?

O'BRIEN

Yes. Women are better at emotions and the havoc those

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emotions wreak. But it must be said that Anna Karenina is the most believable heroine. The last scene where she goes to the station and looks down at the rails and thinks of Vronski's rejection is terrible in its depiction of despair. Women, on the whole, are better at plumbing the depths. A woman artist can produce a perfect gem, as opposed to a huge piece of rock carving a man might produce. It is not a limitation of talent or intelligence, it is just a different way of looking at the world.

INTERVIEWER

So you don't believe in the feminist argument that the differences between men and women are a question of nurture and not of nature; that women look at the world differently because they have been conditioned to do so?

O'BRIEN

Not in the least! I believe that we are fundamentally, biologically, and therefore psychologically different. I am not like any man I have met, ever, and that divide is what both interests me and baffles me. A lot of things have been said by feminists about equality, about liberation, but not all of these things are gospel truth. They are opinions the way my books are opinions, nothing more. Of course I would like women to have a better time but I don't see it happening, and for a very simple and primal reason: people are pretty savage towards each other, be they men or women.

INTERVIEWER

Yet your own success is, to a certain degree, due to the fact that your writing coincided with the rise of the feminist movement, because invariably it portrayed loving, sensitive, good women, being victimized by hard, callous men, and it hit the right note at the right time. Would you agree with that?

O'BRIEN

I would think so. However, I am not the darling of the feminists. They think I am too preoccupied with old-fashioned themes like love and longing. Though one woman

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in *MS* magazine pointed out that I send bulletins from battle fronts where other women do not go. I think I do. The reason why I resent being lectured at is that my psyche is so weighed down with its own paraphernalia! No man or woman from outside could prescribe to me what to do. I have enough trouble keeping madness at bay.

INTERVIEWER

Your description of small towns and their enclosed communities reminds me of some of America's Southern writers, like Faulkner. Did they influence you?

O'BRIEN

Faulkner is an important writer though an imperfect one. I did go through a stage when I read a lot of Southern writers: Carson McCullers, Eudora Welty, Flannery O'Connor. . . . Any small, claustrophobic, in-grown community resembles another. The passion and ignorance in the Deep South of America and the west of Ireland are the same.

INTERVIEWER

This is the opposite of the high society and the aristocratic world of Proust's *À la recherche du temps perdu*, which has also been a major source of inspiration to you.

O'BRIEN

Proust's influence on me, along with his genius, was his preoccupation with memory and his obsession with the past. His concentration on even the simplest detail—like one petal of a flower, or the design on a dinner plate—has unique, manic intensity. Also, when I read his biography by George Painter I felt the tenderness of his soul and wished I could have met him as a human being. You see, Joyce and Proust, although very different, broke the old mold by recognizing the importance of the rambling, disjointed nature of what goes on in the head, the interior monologue. I wonder how they would fare now. These are more careless times. Literature is no longer sacred, it is a business. There is an invisible um-

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bilical cord between the writer and his potential reader, and I fear that the time has gone when readers could sink into a book the way they did in the past, for the *pace* of life is fast and frenetic. The world is cynical: the dwelling on emotions, the perfection of style, the intensity of a Flaubert is wasted on modern sensibility. I have a feeling that there is a *dying*, if not a *death*, of great literature. Some blame the television for it. Perhaps. There is hardly any distinction between a writer and a journalist—indeed, most writers *are* journalists. Nothing wrong with journalism any more than with dentistry, but they are worlds apart! Whenever I read the English Sunday papers I notice that the standard of literacy is high—all very clever and hollow—but no dues to literature. They care about their own egos. They synopsize the book, tell the plot. Well, fuck the plot! That is for precocious schoolboys. What matters is the imaginative *truth*, and the perfection and care with which it has been rendered. After all, you don't say of a ballet dancer, "He jumped in the air, then he twirled around, etc. . ." You are just *carried away* by his dancing. The nicest readers are—and I know by the letters I receive—youngish people who are still eager and uncontaminated, who approach a book without hostility. But when I read Anita Brookner's novel *Look At Me*, I feel I am in the grip of a most wonderful, imaginative writer. The same is true of Margaret Atwood. Also, great literature is dying because young people, although they don't talk about it much, feel and fear a holocaust.

INTERVIEWER

What about your own relationship with critics? Do you feel misunderstood and neglected by them, or have they been kind to you? Have you ever been savaged by them?

O'BRIEN

Oh yes! I have been savaged all right! I believe one reviewer lost her job on the *New Statesman* because her review of my book, *A Pagan Place*, was too personal. She went on and on about my illiterate background. On the whole I have had

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more serious consideration in the United States than in Britain or Ireland. Perhaps because I am not known there as a "personality"! I do not despair though, for the real test of writing is not in the reading but in the rereading. I am not ashamed of my books being reread. The misunderstanding may be due just to geography, and to race. The Irish and the English are poles apart in thought and disposition.

INTERVIEWER

It may also be due to a certain—and very un-British—*démesure* in your writing; I mean they find you too sentimental.

O'BRIEN

I am glad to say that Dickens was accused of sentimentality and, by God, he lives on!

INTERVIEWER

You were brought up as a devout Catholic and had a convent education. At one point you even contemplated becoming a nun. What made you give up religion?

O'BRIEN

I married a divorcé, and that was my first "Fall." Add to that the hounding nature of Irish Catholicism and you can dimly understand. We had a daily admonition which went:

> You have but one soul to save
> One God to love and serve
> One Eternity to prepare for
> Death will come soon
> Judgement will follow, and then
> Heaven—or Hell—*For Ever*!

INTERVIEWER

In your novel *A Pagan Place*, the heroine does become a nun. Was that a vicarious fulfillment of a subconscious wish?

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O'BRIEN

Perhaps. I did think of becoming a nun when I was very young, but it went out of my mind later, chased away by sexual desire!

INTERVIEWER

Another interesting aspect of that novel is that it is written in the second person singular, like a soliloquy. It is somewhat reminiscent of Molly Bloom's soliloquy in *Ulysses*; were you conscious of the influence?

O'BRIEN

I didn't take Molly's as a model. The reason was psychological. As a child you are both your secret self and the "you" that your parents think you are. So the use of the second person was a way of combining the two identities. But I tend not to examine these things too closely—they just happen.

INTERVIEWER

Religion has played such a crucial part in your life and evolution, yet you have not dealt with it on any philosophical or moral level, as have Graham Greene or George Bernanos; you haven't made religion the central theme of any of your novels. Why?

O'BRIEN

That is perhaps one of the differences between men and women who go through the same experiences. I flee from my persecutors. I have not confronted religion.

INTERVIEWER

Do you think you ever will?

O'BRIEN

I hope so—when I have got rid of the terror and the anxiety. Or perhaps when I know exactly what I believe or don't believe.

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INTERVIEWER

Let's talk about the subjects that are dealt with in your work, its central themes, which are romantic love and Ireland. Some people—and not only feminists!—think that your preoccupation with romance verges at times on the sentimental and the "Romantic Novel" formula. You quoted Aragon in answer: "Love is your last chance, there is really nothing else to keep you there."

O'BRIEN

Other people have said it too, even the Beatles! Emily Dickinson wrote, "And is there more than love and death, then tell me its name?" But my work is concerned with *loss* as much as with love. Loss is every child's theme because by necessity the child loses its mother and its bearings. And writers, however mature and wise and eminent, are children at heart. So my central theme is loss—loss of love, loss of self, loss of God. I have just finished a play, my third, which is about my family. In it for the first time I have allowed my father, who is always the ogre figure in my work, to weep for the loss of *his* child. Therefore, I might, if the Gods are good to me, find that my understanding of love has become richer and stronger than my dread of loss. You see, my own father was what you might call the "archetypal" Irishman—a gambler, drinker, a man totally unequipped to be a husband or a father. And of course that colored my views, distorted them, and made me seek out demons.

INTERVIEWER

Is that why, in nearly all your novels, women are longing to establish a simple, loving, harmonious relationship with men, but are unable to do so?

O'BRIEN

My experience was pretty extreme, so that it is hard for me to imagine harmony, or even affinity, between men and

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women. I would need to be reborn.

INTERVIEWER

The other central theme of your work is Ireland. It seems to me that you have the same love-hate relationship with Ireland that most exiles have with their native country: on the one hand an incurable nostalgia and longing, and on the other the fact that one cannot go back, because the reasons that made one leave in the first place are still there. There is a constant conflict in the soul.

O'BRIEN

My relationship with Ireland is very complex. I could not live there for a variety of reasons. I felt oppressed and strangulated from an early age. That was partly to do with my parents who were themselves products and victims of their history and culture. That is to say, alas, they were superstitious, fanatical, engulfing. At the same time they were bursting with talent—I know this from my mother's letters, as she wrote to me almost every day. So I have to thank them for a heritage that includes talent, despair, and permanent fury. When I was a student in Dublin my mother found a book of Sean O'Casey in my suitcase and wanted to *burn* it! *But without reading it!* So they hated literature without knowing it. We know that the effect of our parents is indelible, because we internalize as a child and it remains inside us forever. Even when the parents die, you dream of them as if they were still there. Everything was an occasion for fear, religion was force-fed the way they feed the geese of Strasbourg for paté! I feel I am a cripple with a craving for wings. So much for the personal aspect. As for the country itself, it is no accident that almost all Irish writers leave the country. You know why? Ireland, as Joyce said, eats her writers the way a sow eats her farrow. He also called it a warren of "prelates and kinechites." Of course there's the beauty of the landscape, the poetry, the fairy tales, the vividness. I have shown my love and my entanglement with the place as much as I have shown my hatred. But they think that I have shown only my hatred.

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INTERVIEWER

Is that why they had an auto-da-fé of your first novel in your native village?

O'BRIEN

It was a humble event, as befits a backward place. Two or three people had gone to Limerick and bought *The Country Girls.* The parish priest asked them to hand in the books, which they did, and he burnt them on the grounds of the church. Nevertheless, a lot of people read it. My mother was very harsh about it; she thought I was a disgrace. That is the sadness—it takes you half a life to get out of the pits of darkness and stupidity. It fills me with anger, and with pity.

INTERVIEWER

Do you think that after all these years and through your books you have exorcised the demon and can let it rest?

O'BRIEN

I hope not, because one needs one's demons to create.

INTERVIEWER

After that small auto-da-fé, did anything else of that kind happen?

O'BRIEN

They used to ban my books, but now when I go there, people are courteous to my face, though rather slanderous behind my back. Then again, Ireland has changed. There are a lot of young people who are irreligious, or less religious. Ironically, they wouldn't be interested in my early books—they would think them gauche. They are aping English and American mores. If I went to a dance hall in Dublin now I would feel as alien as in a disco in Oklahoma.

INTERVIEWER

You are not a political writer because as you say politics are concerned with the social and the external, while your preoc-

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cupations are with the inner, psychological life. Nonetheless, considering your emotional involvement with Ireland, how have you kept away from the situation in Northern Ireland—terrorism, the IRA, etc. . . ?

O'BRIEN

I have written one long piece on Northern Ireland for the German magazine *Stern.* My feelings about it are so manifold. I think it is mad, a so-called religious war, in this day and age. At the same time, I can't bear the rhetoric of the Unionists; I mean Ireland is *one small* island, and those six counties do not belong to Britain. Equally I abhor terrorism, whoever does it, the IRA, the Arabs, the Israelis. But when I stayed in Northern Ireland to research and write the article, I realized that the Catholics are second-class citizens. They live in terrible slums, in poverty, and know no way of improving their conditions. I have not set a novel in Northern Ireland simply because I do not know enough about it. I dislike cant—you get that from politicians. Writers have to dig deep for experience. I might go and live there for a while, in order to discover and later write about it. But so far I have refrained from bringing the topic into a book merely as a voyeur.

INTERVIEWER

Let's get back to Virginia Woolf. . . . Why and when did she become an obsession for you? After all, you are very different as writers and as people.

O'BRIEN

I first read her critical essays, *The Common Reader*, and I saw a woman who loved literature, unlike many critics who just *use* it. The essays are on Hazlitt, Wordsworth, Hardy, everyone. I was overwhelmed first by the generosity of her mind and its perspicacity. Later I read *To The Lighthouse* and my favorite, *Mrs. Dalloway*, which is very spry and spritely. Then I was asked to write a play about her and I began to read everything she had written—diaries, letters, etc. . . . I realized that she gave of herself so utterly, so *shamelessly*. Her

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photographs show her as aloof, which she was in some ways. But in the diaries and letters, she tells *everything*! If she buys a pair of gloves she has to commit it to paper. So I came to know her and to love her.

INTERVIEWER

Some critics pointed to the play's neglect of her intellectual vigor and her bitchiness. Do you think her bitchiness was due to lack of sexual gratification?

O'BRIEN

She did have a bitchy side, but alongside it a childlike need for affection. She called people pet names, waited for her husband to come home, adored her sister Vanessa and wanted her approval. I saw Woolf as a troubled, *needful* creature. Her bitchiness was diminishing, certainly, and she would have been a grander figure without it. I selected those parts of her that charter her dilemma, her march towards suicide. Another writer, say an English homosexual, could write a very waspish, very witty play about her. I hope that mine was valid.

INTERVIEWER

Having been successful at novels and short stories, you tried your hand at drama—plays and screenplays. How did that come about?

O'BRIEN

I was asked to adapt my own novel, *A Pagan Place*, for the stage and it opened a new vista for me. Then with some experience I tackled Woolf. Now I have written a third play which for the time being is called *Home Sweet Home*, or *Family Butchers*. I feel drama is more direct, more suitable for expressing passions. Confrontation is the stuff of drama. It happens rather than is described. The play starts in the early morning, the voice of an Irish tenor comes over the gramophone—John McCormmack is singing "Bless This House, Oh Lord We Pray," then he's interrupted by a gunshot

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followed by another gunshot. The lights come on, a man and a woman appear, and you know that this is a play about passion and violence. You go straight for the jugular.

INTERVIEWER

When you start a play, or a novel, or a short story, do you have a basic idea? Or a sentence? Something that triggers off the process of creating the work?

O'BRIEN

I always have the first line. Even with my very first book, *The Country Girls*, I went around with this first sentence in my head long before I sat down to write it.*

INTERVIEWER

Once you have started, do you have the whole scheme in your mind or do characters and plot take their own course and lead you, as some novelists say they do. I mean, Balzac was so surprised and moved by Old Goriot's death that he opened his window and shouted, "Le Père Goriot est mort! Le Père Goriot est mort!"

O'BRIEN

I know more or less, but I don't discuss it with myself. It is like sleepwalking; I don't know exactly where I am going but I know I will get there. When I am writing, I am so glad to be doing it that whatever form it takes—play, novel, etc.—I am thankful to the Fates. I keep dozens of pens by me, and exercise books.

INTERVIEWER

When success came and you began to be famous and lionized, did it affect your life, work, and outlook in any way? Is success good for an artist, or does it limit his field of experience?

* "I wakened quickly and sat up in bed abruptly."

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O'BRIEN

It depends on the degree of success and on the disposition of the artist. It was very nice for me to be published, as I had longed for it. But my success has been rather modest. It hasn't been meteoric. Nor was it financially shattering—just enough to carry me along.

INTERVIEWER

But you have had a great deal of social success: fame, publicity, so on . . .

O'BRIEN

I am not conscious of it. I go to functions more as a duty than for pleasure, and I am always *outside* looking in, not the other way round. But I am grateful to have had enough success not to feel a disaster—it has allayed my hopelessness. Undoubtedly success contributed to the break-up of my marriage. I had married very young. My husband was an attractive father figure—a Professor Higgins. When my book was published and well-received, it altered things between us. The break would have come anyway, but my success sped it up. Then began a hard life; but when you are young, you have boundless energy—you run the house, mind the children, *and* write your despair. I don't know if I could do it all now. Looking back I realize that I am one of the luckiest people in the world, since no matter how down I go something brings me back. Is it God's grace or just peasant resilience?

INTERVIEWER

Perhaps it is the creative act of writing. John Updike once said that the minute he puts an unhappiness down on paper, it metamorphoses into a lump of sugar!

O'BRIEN

I think he was simplifying. The original pain that prompted the writing does not lessen, but it is gratifying to give it form and shape.

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INTERVIEWER

Did money ever act as a spur? You were very prolific in the sixties, and still are.

O'BRIEN

I have never written anything in order to make money. A story comes to me, is given me, as it were, and I write it. But perhaps the need to earn a living and my need to write coincided. I know that I would still write if tomorrow I was given a huge legacy, and I will always be profligate.

INTERVIEWER

How do you organize your time? Do you write regularly, every day? Philip Roth has said that he writes eight hours a day three hundred and sixty-five days a year! Do you work as compulsively?

O'BRIEN

He is a man, you see. Women have the glorious excuse of having to shop, cook, clean! When I am working I write in a kind of trance, long hand, in these several copybooks. I meant to tidy up before you came! I write in the morning because one is nearer to the unconscious, the source of inspiration. I never work at night because by then the shackles of the day are around me, what James Stephens (author of *The Crock of Gold*) called, "That flat, dull catalogue of dreary things that fasten themselves to my wings," and I don't sit down three hundred and sixty-five days a year because I'm not that kind of writer. I wish I were! Perhaps I don't take myself that seriously. Another reason why I don't write constantly is that I feel I have written all I had wanted to say about love and loss and loneliness and being a victim and all that. I have finished with that territory. And I have not yet embraced another one. It may be that I'm going towards it—I hope and pray that this is the case.

INTERVIEWER

When you are writing, are you disciplined? Do you keep

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regular hours, turn down invitations, and hibernate?

O'BRIEN

Yes, but discipline doesn't come into it. It is what one has to do. The impulse is stronger than anything. I don't like too much social life any way. It is gossip and bad white wine. It's a waste. Writing is like carrying a fetus. I get up in the morning, have a cup of tea, and come into this room to work. I never go out to lunch, never, but I stop around one or two and spend the rest of the afternoon attending to mundane things. In the evening I might read or go out to a play or a film, or see my sons. Did I tell you that I spend a lot of time moping? Did Philip Roth say that he moped?

INTERVIEWER

Don't you feel restless and lonely if you have worked all day and have to spend the evening alone?

O'BRIEN

Less lonely than if I were bored at a dinner party. If I get restless I might ring up one of a handful of friends who are close enough to come to the rescue. Rilke said, "Loneliness is a very good practice for eternity." Loneliness is not intolerable—depression is.

INTERVIEWER

Before the film script on Joan of Arc that you are writing now, you wrote another two. One of them, *Zee & Co.*, starring Elizabeth Taylor, was a big-budget, Hollywood film. How did you enjoy that experience?

O'BRIEN

The film world is inhabited by gangsters. I have met many producers and very few of them could I accuse of being sensitive, or interested in writing. They are business people whose material is other people's imagination, and that invariably leads to trouble. People in the clothing industry or the motor business are dealing with merchandise, but the producer's

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raw material is first and foremost the writer. So I can't say that I had a happy experience. But it *is* possible; low-budget films like *Gregory's Girl* or *The Country Girls* do get made. I had a marvelous time with the latter; they didn't have *four* writers all rewriting my script. It restored my faith. I do believe that cinema and the television are the media of the future, more than books, simply because people are too restive. I put as much into a film script as into anything I write—it is, I believe, an art form, and great directors like Bergman, Buñuel, Hitchcock, and Fassbinder have made it so. What happened with *Zee & Co.*—and what happens generally when you get involved with Hollywood—is that you give them the script and then the director or leading actress proceed to write their own stuff. They are often as capable of writing as I am of brain surgery! So they just disembowel it. And they do it for two reasons: one is ego and the other is ignorance. They know nothing about writing and therefore think they can bring their own *ideas* to it. Now, in the theater when actors want something changed they ask the author.

INTERVIEWER

If someone had time to read only one of your books, which one would you recommend?

O'BRIEN

A Pagan Place.

INTERVIEWER

Do you feel that your best book, the one that every writer aspires to, is yet to come?

O'BRIEN

It had better be! I need to develop, to enlarge my spheres of experience.

INTERVIEWER

When you say you are changing your life, do you also mean that the subject matter of your fiction will change with it?

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O'BRIEN

I think so. I am giving a lecture in Boston next month about women in literature. I had to come to the forlorn conclusion that all the great heroines have been created by men. I had an anthology of women's writing called *Bold New Women* in which the editor, Barbara Alson, very wisely says that all women writers have written about sex, because sex is their biological life, their environment, and that for a woman a sexual encounter is not just the mechanical thing it can be for a man but—and she uses this wonderful phrase—"a clutch on the universe." I have written quite a lot of love stories; I don't think I want to write those anymore. I even find them hard to read! It doesn't mean that I am not interested in love anymore—that goes on as long as there is breath. I mean I am not going to *write* about it in the same way.

INTERVIEWER

Could it have something to do with age?

O'BRIEN

Bound to have something to do with age. The attitude toward sex changes in two ways. Sexual love becomes deeper and one realizes how fundamental it is and how rich. At the same time, one sees that it is a sort of mutual game and that attraction makes one resort to all sorts of ruses and strategies. To an outsider it is all patent, even laughable. Shakespeare saw through this glorious delusion better than anyone and *As You Like It* is the funniest play about love, yet it is steeped in love.

INTERVIEWER

What about the new cult of chastity? Germaine Greer's new book advocates restraint—a backlash against a decade or so of permissiveness. Have you been influenced by the changing mood?

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O'BRIEN

I have always espoused chastity except when one can no longer resist the temptation. I know promiscuity is boring, much more than fish-and-chips, which is comforting.

INTERVIEWER

Do you find sex scenes difficult to write, considering your puritanical background?

O'BRIEN

Not really. When you are writing you are not conscious of the reader, so that you don't feel embarrassed. I'm sure Joyce had a most heady and wonderful time writing the last fifty pages of *Ulysses*—glorious Molly Bloom. He must have written it in one bout, thinking: I'll show the women of the world that I am omniscient!

INTERVIEWER

What do you think the future has in store for literature? You have been very pessimistic so far. For example, last year nearly three hundred novels were published in France, and few except the ones that won the big prizes were read. Will we go on endlessly writing novels with so few making a mark?

O'BRIEN

As you know the future itself is perilous. But as regards books, there is first the financial aspect of publishing. Already books are very expensive, so that a first novel of quality will have less of a chance of being picked up. Say a new Djuna Barnes, or indeed Nathalie Sarraute, might not get published. If Woolf's *The Waves* were to be published today it would have pitiful sales. Of course, "how-to" books, spy stories, thrillers, and science-fiction all sell by the millions. What would be wonderful—what we *need* just now—is some astonishing fairy tale. I read somewhere the other day that the cavemen did not paint what they saw, but what they *wished* they had seen. We need that, in these lonely, lunatic times.

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INTERVIEWER

So if we manage to save the planet, is there hope for literature as well?

O'BRIEN

Oh yes! At this very moment, some imagination is spawning something wonderful that might make us tremble. Let's say there will always be literature because the imagination is boundless. We just need to care more for the imagination than for the trivia and the commerce of life. Literature is the next best thing to God. Joyce would disagree. He would say literature *is*, in essence, God.

—**Shusha Guppy**

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Portfolio

Drawings from the 1950s

Louise Bourgeois

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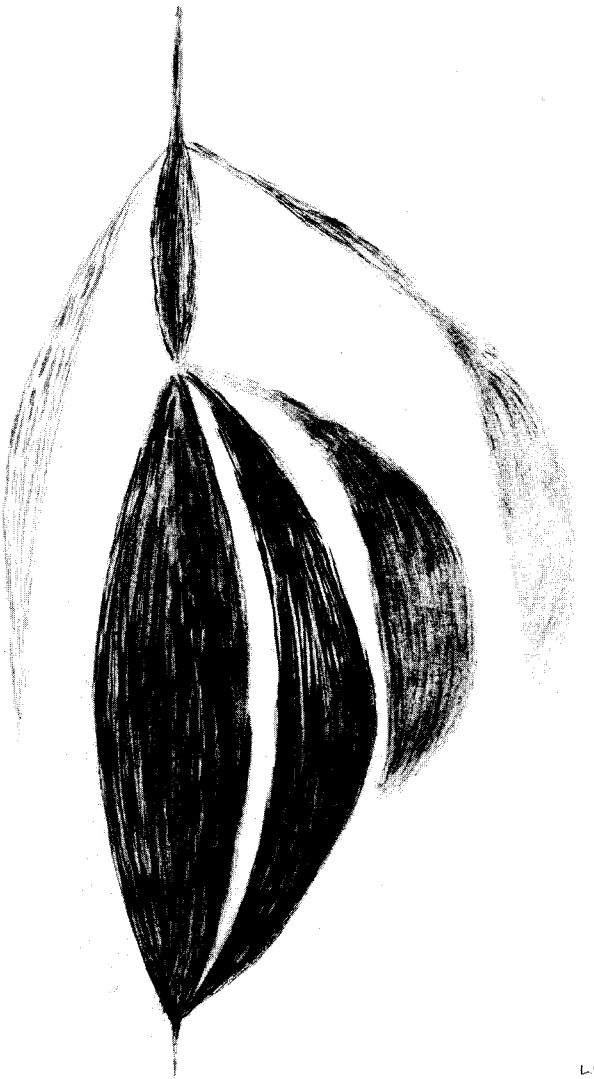

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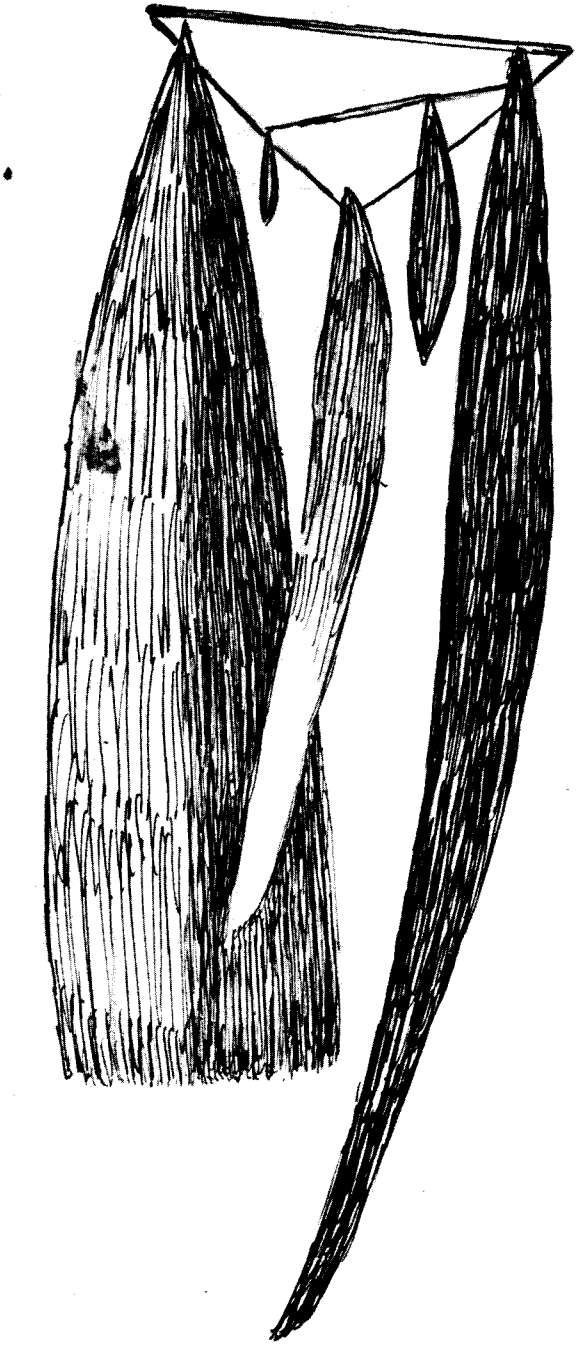

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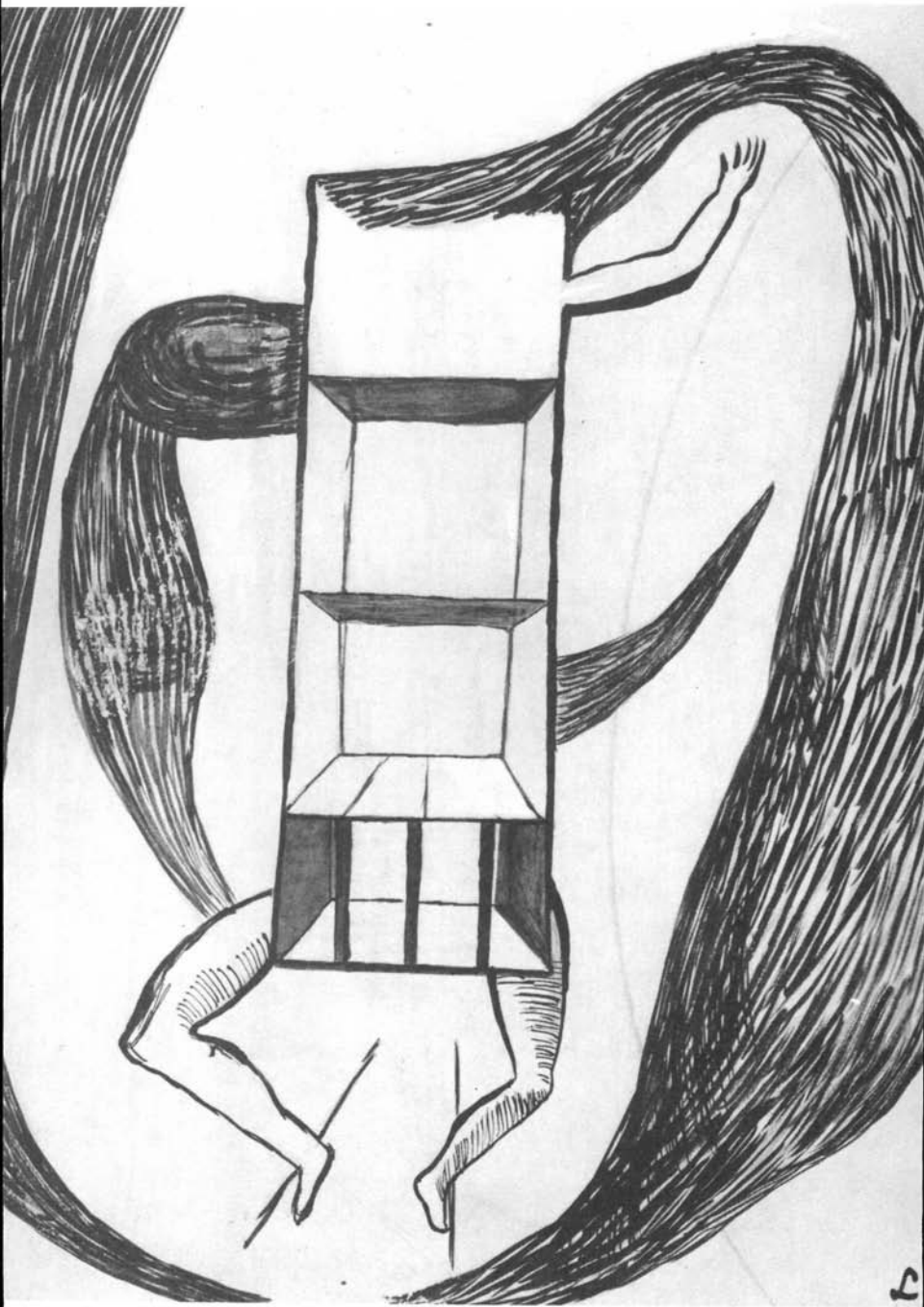

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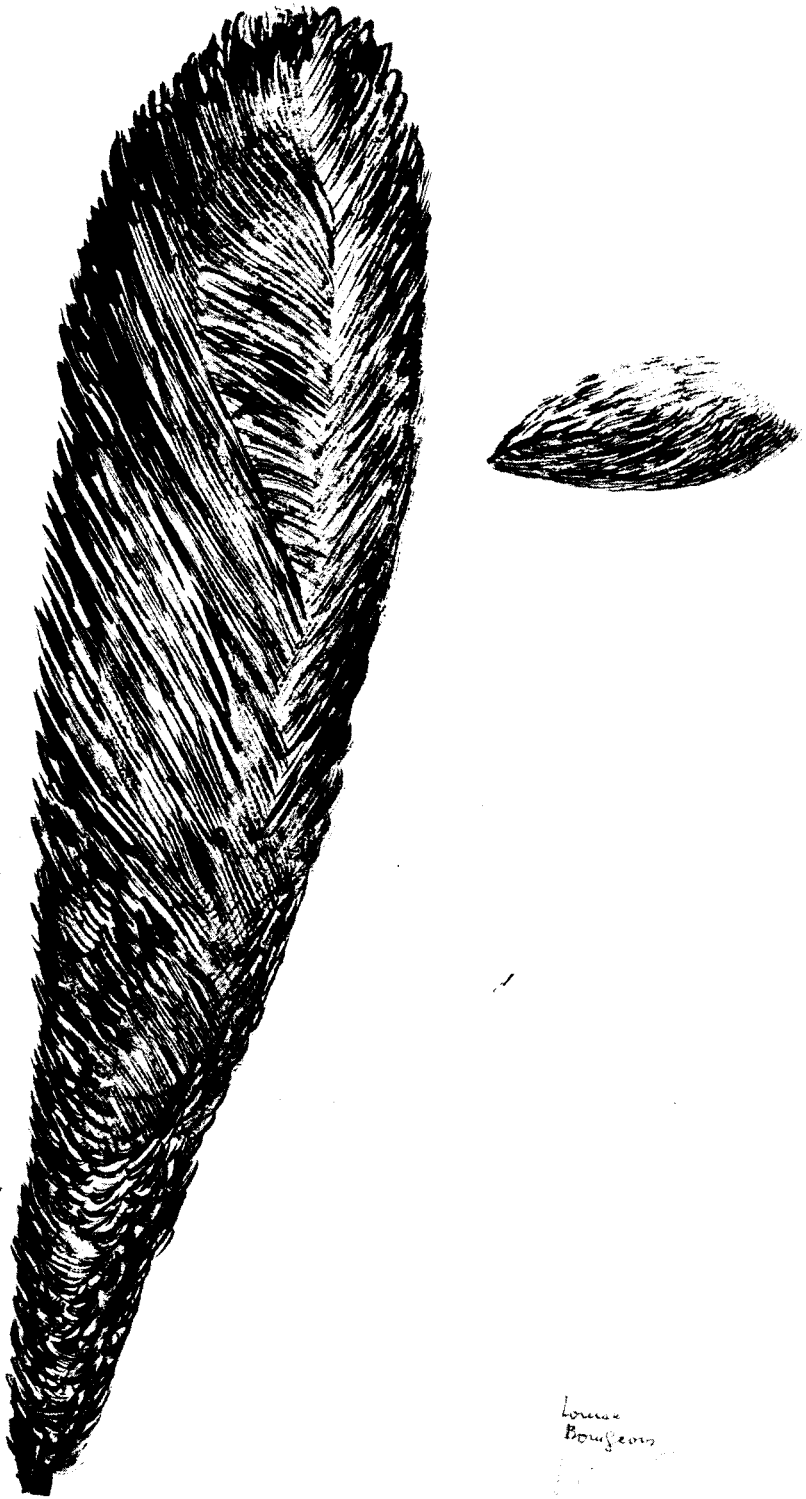

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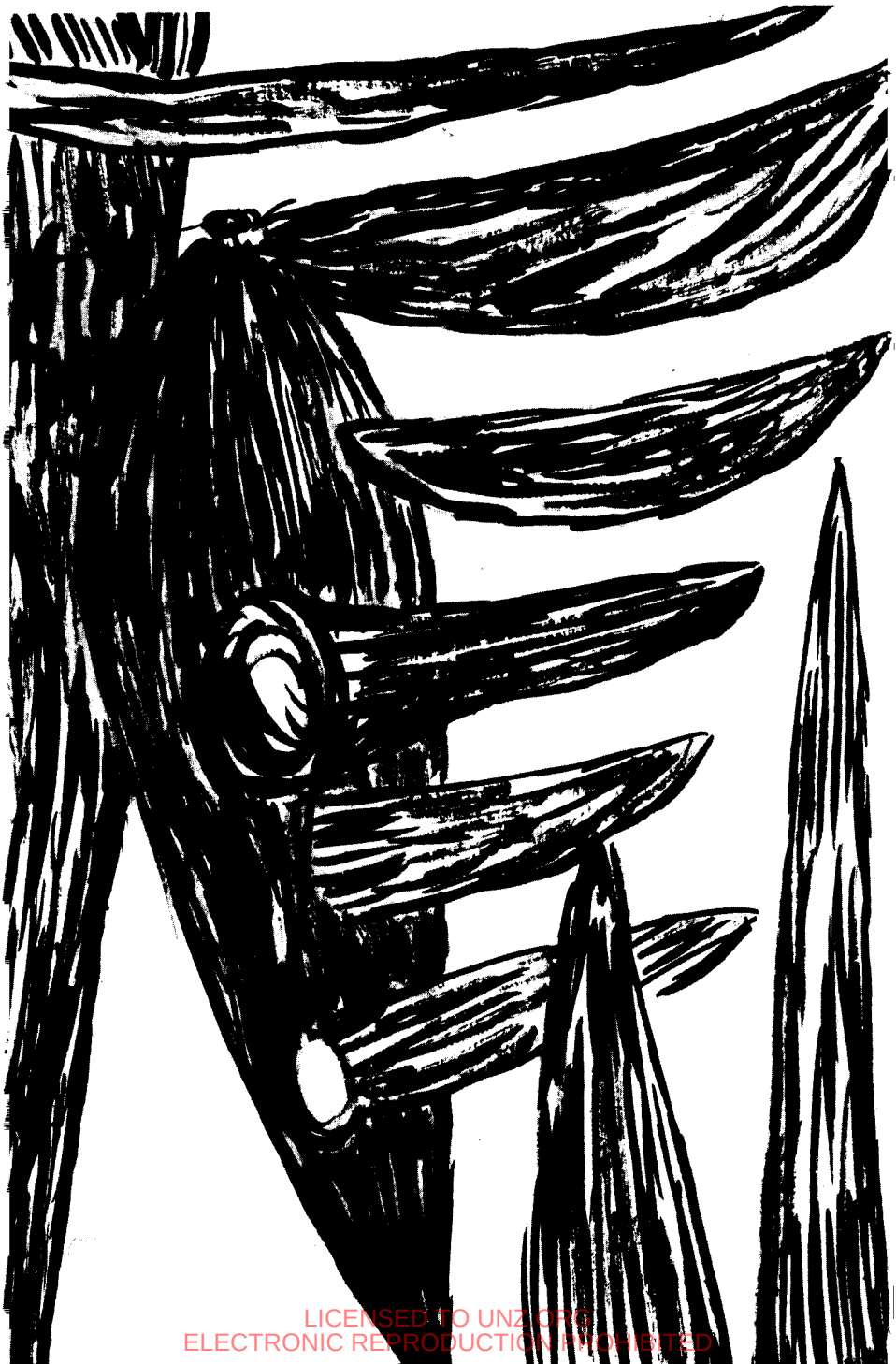

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Stories I'd Rather Not Tell

Linda Ashour

My father used to say about my mother that she read so many books, he could hear pages turning inside her when she lay down beside him at night. Eerie, he said. Gave him the willies how she always had her nose stuck in some book or other. Not any more, though. Now she just watches Schuller every week, his "Hour of Power." She's got her eyes on my son, Sam, who just hurled a block at the T.V. screen.

"*Con!*"

"Don't any of his baby friends speak English?"

"He doesn't have any baby friends."

"Well. Take him outside, Lucy. All I ask is one hour Sunday morning."

I pack Sam, kicking and screaming, into his snowsuit.

"*Non! Cochon!*"

We throw melba toast bits into the slush and speculate about what will walk out of the woods behind my mother's house. Bird, bear, bull. I feed words into my son and listen as they come back to me in another tongue. He hasn't got the

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hang of this yet. A male cardinal watches us for a long time from the limb of a diseased oak. When he finally screws up all his courage and swoops down on our offering, Sam runs for him and gobbles up the toast himself. Inside, on the screen, I see the gleam of Schuller's glasses. Whatever he says must be right on target. My mother is nodding her assent.

At the airport my husband sadly pushes the hair out of my eyes, in search of me, and whispers *reviens vite*. For months he asks me to change my hair. We pore over magazines together trying to find something appropriate to the shape of my face. When we think we have it, I take an issue of *Cosmo* into a stylist who renders me the victim of some unnatural disaster. My husband cooks me wonderful meals for weeks afterward, as penance. Everytime he puts Sam and me on a plane for America, he photographs us; he takes something out of my purse at the last minute to keep. It is a miracle to him that we return. While we are gone he studies maps, does what he can to build courage. He will come with me one day, he promises. He puts his mouth strangely around the word Oklahoma, repeating it until he gets it right. I have been cruel at times, telling him about gun racks routinely mounted on pick-up trucks. Recreating in morbid detail a dinner I was served that was completely brown, down to the black bottom pie for dessert. Red-necks that would hang him by his silk scarves. I hoard for myself the endless flat skies, pot-bellied ponies and the smell of clover hay as if they are family jewels. I don't want to hear it retold, any of it. The way we drive and what we eat in the morning, how we look in a shopping center. Not yet anyhow.

When we return to the house my mother is sitting at her desk, writing out a check. I peer over her shoulder. It's made out to Schuller.

"The church is in trouble."

"He's conning you."

"He asked in a very dignified way. Kind of like it hurt him to have to ask. Whereas Oral Roberts cries."

"What do you mean?"

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"I mean when he was trying to get his hospital built and he was asking the viewers for donations, he cried. When you were in high school, giving all your part-time money to that overseas thing, did I speak up? Nylon slips sent to starving Africans. At least I know where my dollars are heading."

I remember the article I read about Schuller's sleek building in Orange County. How it was built by Philip Johnson, the architect from Cambridge.

"Where are your dollars heading, Mom?"

"Right back to me. Haven't you noticed how beatific I am these days?"

She laughs and hands me a cigarette she's just lit. No filter. I smoke quietly and watch Sam who shakes his head no, no, no.

"When are we going to get that husband of yours to visit? I'll cook him all the best things I know and learn a few words of French. Or if he doesn't like that I'll just sit and smile, like we're old friends or something. Tell him, Lucy. I could be dead tomorrow."

"He'll come, Mom. Maybe next year."

When I announced that I was moving to France, no one was surprised. My mother took off for two days and returned with four huge pots of moisturizing cream made up especially for me by a friend she has in the Ozarks. "The air is different over there. Don't come back to me looking like some of the pictures I've seen. Young as you are." We told my father on a Saturday, I remember. He was working under the car that day without his safety glasses and shouted when motor oil dripped into his eyes. He called a hospital near the house and they told him to rinse out his eyes every twenty minutes throughout the day until about four o'clock. Every twenty minutes I would hear him muttering, father's complaints. "Lucy, you there? Buddy of mine from Texarkana caught himself one hell of a case of syphilis over there. First pair of black stockings I ever saw in my life was in Paris, there in the Place Pigalle. Nearly fell off the damn bus. You can get yourself in a peck of trouble over there, young lady." The night before I

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left, my mother threw a big party, filling the house with uncles and aunts, cousins she swore she'd never speak to again. When everyone had found a place to sit and she'd passed around her plates of cocktail cheeses and olives, she cleared her throat real loud and said something she thought would unify the evening, make it clear why we were all gathered together.

"Lucy, stand up and show everybody the long scar on your knee."

Everyone nodded and studied the half-moon that breaks just below my kneecap. My niece wanted to touch it.

"This is a girl who tried very hard to dig her way to China. Might have succeeded, too, if that axe hadn't hung her up so bad."

Mom is a believer in fate and destiny. She continued, since she had everyone's attention.

"When all the other kids were out pretending to be horses, this one was drawing make-believe maps. All bright-colored with crazy names like Mutabunga. Really! She made county lines and everything. Says to me once when she was in bed with pneumonia that if God put a big huge straw into the Atlantic and sucked as hard as He could, people in New York would start talking Spanish."

She turned to the room she'd filled with my father's sisters and brothers, her arms folded serenely over her chest. All those sisters and brothers who had carried on about her over the years. That I would spend my first year in Europe cleaning toilets, eating meals alone or in the kitchen with children meant nothing. My move to France was her vendetta. It was, however, my mad cousin Ella who gave me my true, my finest farewell. She led me quietly into the guest room and cleared out a space for us on the coat-filled bed. The air smelled like sweet perfume and animal pelts.

"Do you know the truth about the word *encore*?"

"What truth? It means again."

"Yes, but the origin of the word. Okay, close your eyes and listen. There were two lovers in France centuries ago, not Abélard and Héloise but two others. She suffered from in-

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satiable appetites and he was hopelessly in love with her. They locked themselves into an attic chamber somewhere in Paris and began to make love. Each time when he was finished she would whisper 'encore' until he could no longer continue. At that moment they set themselves on fire."

"Ella, I've never . . ."

"I swear it's true. Another truth is that the average Frenchman knows sixty-five ways to do it."

This was nine years ago. I ask Mom how cousin Ella is each time I return. This year looks brighter. The clinic released her in September and ladies from the Auxiliary Guild are teaching her to use a phone book.

My mother's collie will not leave the utility room this morning; the air is that cold and dry. She is in her thirteenth year and my father and I would both like her put to sleep, something Mom will not discuss. She claims their spirits are so much in tandem that when one falls off the bike, the other will, too. She is making a concoction not unlike steak tartare to lure the dog out of bed, to stretch her brittle bones.

"Lucy, hand me an egg from the fridge, won't you? How do you like it, Sam?"

He is delighted with breakfast, two clown faces fashioned from Thomas muffins and raisins. He waves an empty cup in reply.

I look at my mother's sturdy back, her shoulder blades that I once thought were angel wings. Her bathrobe has faded into a lighter blue around the elbows. I consider for a moment.

"Mom, where's Cody?"

I would not call the gesture a shrug. Closer to a horse's quivering flank, dislodging a bothersome fly.

"You know when I wrote that check out to Schuller I did something I probably shouldn't have. I enclosed a note asking him whether he couldn't address himself to the levels of love, as a subject one Sunday. Of course after I mailed it I had all kinds of misgivings. But he does sometimes open his sermons with little things his listeners have sent in."

"Has anybody seen him?"

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She is stooped over the dog now, nearly spoon-feeding the thing.

"I've got a pie made for Becky if you want to take it over. Just let her cry if she needs to. That's something we've all been doing, just sitting it out with her and letting her cry. Maybe Galveston, but nobody knows. Never figured any kid of mine would bring so much havoc into the world with him."

Nobody ever knew what to make of Cody's misdemeanors in love. We almost never picked up the telephone when he was in the house. We knew it would be some breathless, high-voiced girl asking for Cody Lerner please. Cody and I are only two years apart and I grew used to it in high school. Girls I hardly knew passing me notes in the hall or chumming up to me in the cafeteria with the ultimate goal being a better shot at my black-haired, blue-eyed brother. Through it all I felt responsible for the beating hearts he seemed to leave in his wake. Was it me who taught him to mistreat women?

I pull up to Becky's house, in the dead center of a wide cul-de-sac. I notice a brown stain around the base of the house, a little like gum-line decay, that I've never noticed before. I wipe my feet on the mat outside the door, remembering my slightly pigeon-toed tracks on her white carpets the year before. The children's shoes are lined up next to the door. They have been taught to change into slippers as they come in the front door. Becky is coming and I cannot think of what to say.

"Oh, Lucy, your hair!"

"Well, yes. Here, Mom sent this for you and the kids."

"Come on in. There's coffee."

Becky was a baton twirler in school and there is still something slightly victorious about her. She has had a permanent and her hair is suspended beautifully about her face. I see she has no intention of crying.

"The girls are upstairs and, you know what, I'm going to just let them stay up there awhile. Eleanor is punishing her dolls at the moment. Listen."

It is true. I hear a small, tight voice in the room above me, a pause and the sound of something being dropped or thrown.

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"When are we going to get to see that husband of yours? He's not the elephant man or something is he?"

"No. He just reads too much about cowboys and Indians; that's the thing. Figures he might get scalped out here."

She is holding up a cookie that looks like a circle of brown lace.

"Have one of these. Guess what? No flour."

"Thanks. Ready when you are, Becky. Where do we start?"

"God. You must be ashamed to have such a bastard for a brother. I think there's a good chance Daddy might shoot him."

We don't have a lot left to say. She shows me a check of Cody's that bounced, a letter to the girls written with a blotchy blue pen. In the kitchen hangs a picture of my brother on skis, his head tipped back in laughter, a can of Coors in his hand. Becky takes my mother's pie and begins to stuff it down the garbage disposal. She uses her hands to do it.

"She's been awful sweet throughout all this, but these damn pies make me nauseous. Tell her I cried. She just eats that up, when I cry."

I drive straight to a matinee. Without thinking I vote for utter debauchery, a giant tub of buttered popcorn I cradle throughout nearly two hours of Richard Gere and Deborah Winger. The film has been released in France and a vaguely military look has begun to surface along the Cote d'Azur. There is of course no telling, but maybe Cody sees himself this way: strong, solitary. Able to fly. The audience twitters happily on the way out of the theatre, tickled that Oklahoma has somehow figured in a major film.

It puzzles Mom that my husband's mother doesn't like me. It bothers her more that after all these years, I have stopped craving love or even acceptance.

"Explain it again, but keep it simple."

"Okay. The first time I saw it was when I was mopping the floor and she threw a fit. See, a Frenchwoman reacts to a tile floor one way, an American woman another. They drape a dishrag over a rubber scraper attached to a handle. I happen

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to prefer a sponge mop which I replace when it is worn out. That mop was a metaphor for her, part of the reason she dislikes me so. I am a member of a throw-away culture. I am frivolous. I also took away her son who came quite voluntarily, I might add."

"Tell me the hospital story again."

When Cody and I were agile enough to be trusted, my father fashioned us a tree house. It was little more than a sweep of two-by-fours surrounded by a low guardrail, but to us it was palatial. Though my mother will never admit to it now, we both remember vividly the day she made off with the stepladder, stranding us while she pedaled endless rounds of "Slaughter on Tenth Avenue" on the player piano. We could see her through the living-room window, perfecting her phony rendition, sliding her hands up and down the scale though she couldn't read a note of music. A significant side of my mother would love every day to be Bastille Day, an endless Boston Tea Party. If not that, then ranks of children racing through pricey department stores, gutting rows of china and crystal.

"Yes. Well, hospital food being what it is everywhere, I had certain cravings after Sam was born that they couldn't satisfy. By that time Martine and I had declared war, but she was still appearing during visiting hours. Still badgering me to tell her what to bring. When I finally confided to her that I wanted, no, *needed* fresh fruits and vegetables, she came daily with a wedge of potroast or cooked chicken. Dried sausage. Just the sort of things I couldn't digest."

"And what happened?"

"She found them all lined up on the window ledge the day I checked out. By that time they were foul as hell."

"Lucy!"

To be fair the fault lies on both sides. Many years ago, Marc's father built three separate houses on a central courtyard. Sufficient lodging for his two sons and their eventual wives and offspring. The intention was a continued heritage, a bloodline, solidarity. Marc's house is a restored livery stable, an artful coalition between past and present. I wanted to be

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happy in that house, wanted to participate in that contract with his parents. What I saw from my kitchen window was this: Martine, sudden and wigless at seven o'clock each morning, thrusting two enormous down quilts out her own upstairs window to air. From where I stood, they looked like lolling, insolent tongues. Not too long afterward, Marc and I were climbing over dry Provençal hills in search of our own lot. We spent long afternoons flat on our backs, thinking about sun exposure, septic tanks, the possibility of air that lifted from the sea. We found our lot one day in November. The owner was a one-legged member of the Legion of Honor who insisted on scaling his property with us. At last, drenched with the effort, he turned to us and said, "*Mes enfants, c'est un bon coin.*" When at last we constructed our strange, personal assembly of rooms we invited him to dinner. The grappa went further than any of us intended and he cried, speaking softly of Algeria. We sublet Marc's house to an artist from Paris, who lives there irregularly during the warm months. I have seen her work. She built a pink wall facing a café-théâtre in the 6th arrondissement. The wall is bursting. Through the cracks you can see women's breasts, buttocks, dismembered hands. The artist was the final straw. Marc and Sam return blurry-eyed, sated from endless Sunday dinners. My absence, I imagine, no longer draws remarks.

"Lucy, come have a look at this couple. I just love it when they're on."

This is my fourth Sunday with Schuller. Mom turns it on loud so she won't miss a word. There is a composite quality to this man. He looks a little like the geography teacher I had in fifth grade, a little like a man I saw in a store yesterday buying a red muffler. It's as if he has reinvented Jesus, stretching out His name into three syllables. Putting muscle into old parables you thought you knew backwards. When Schuller gets to what it was he wanted to say all along, his voice changes dramatically. In fact, it is no longer a voice at all, but something that nearly dismembers you in its insistence. After four Sundays I wouldn't dare turn off his pro-

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gram, or something unthinkable, change the channel. The gesture would be too flip. Now, a well-placed brick through the screen . . . for four Sundays this man has not blinked his eyes.

"Lucy!"

"Coming."

It's true. They are a charming couple, clearly in love. They seem to be wooing Jesus Himself with this song.

"He doesn't ever have underachievers on his show, does he? I mean, you know, people who mean well, but can't carry a tune. People with terminal diseases or criminal records. Stuff like that."

"I don't like your tone."

And neither do I. I return to the kitchen and the job at hand, which is building an eventual tower of dollar pancakes that will not topple with my son. We have eaten our fill and we're now in it for the sport. I need to leave soon. Hold my husband. Put things in the ground for spring. Spar anew with my mother-in-law.

It's Dad who puts them in my hands at the airport. They're worn down to such a smoothness it is unthinkable they can break a jaw or split a skull.

"Dad! Cody has wanted these for years."

"We won't talk about your brother. Now, open your suitcase. You can't carry brass knuckles in your purse."

When Cody was ten and I was eight, the man who sprayed our trees every summer made us close our eyes until they burned. When he told us to open them, he held a pair of brass knuckles in his hands that he found in the woods. He made my mother promise never to split the pair up and my brother and I have bickered over them since. Cody has been spotted in Oklahoma City driving a brand new white Fleetwood. His shoddy character has afforded me these brass knuckles. It's an empty win.

"Lucy, say my name again."

"Well, Agnes, Mom."

"No, as if I were living there."

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"*Agnès.*"

She sighs, prods one high, polished cheekbone with three fingers as if fixing it in place.

"The way you say it. Rhymes with princess. To think I've been wincing about my name for fifty-eight years when it could have been so . . . funny, isn't it?"

As Sam empties my purse during the ascent I think about the next thirteen hours. We will name every part of the body in two languages, dance in the aisles if need be and pick up our loud, fractured life sometime tomorrow. His father will be grateful upon our return, full of lust for his wife and son. When I have slept my fill and am feeling strong again, I will pull on two-hundred-dollar boots and run my husband's hand over hand-tooled leather and steel insteps. I will splice the air with brass knuckles and tell him stories that are not quite true.

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Lorenzo's Collection

Michael Brownstein

Lorenzo is a quiet, even-tempered man of independent means who has come to accept full-fledged addiction to his playthings. Waking up in the middle of the night, he stares across his moonlit room at the changing assortment of objects and scenes which periodically lights up before him on the floor. Lorenzo does not like to leave his bed, and has not been outside the confines of his high-rise apartment, on East Twenty-eighth Street in midtown Manhattan, for more than a year now, although in recent weeks the thought that he may never give up collecting has made him uneasy.

The dozen or so situations which comprise his collection at any one time resemble dioramas: they materialize without warning and sit glowing in the corners of his room. Although he cannot make them appear, those he ignores eventually fade away. A few, like surviving inhabitants of an eidetic zoo, run back and forth along the big, blank apartment-house windows which look into the sky from the twenty-second floor. Some have been with him for months; others, like the

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herd of miniature ponies galloping headlong into the wainscoting, vanish moments after he takes notice of them. As he lies in bed on this particular evening, an unseasonably warm and dry one in May, Lorenzo sees:

- A caped and quilted rabbit, over four feet tall, with festive tablecloth eyes, a pink pincushion nose, and aluminum foil ears. It stands holding a volume of Horace securely in its paws, and every so often reads aloud: "Why not beneath a tall plane tree or this pine here recline at ease? . . . They change their sky, but not their mind, who run across the sea. . . ." After an hour has passed the rabbit lays the book aside and makes a tour of Lorenzo's room, dropping ashes from the sleeves of its cape as it goes. He is certain, after a night spent observing its movements, that this singular creature wanders around the room perfectly at random, returning to take up its book only when its red and white checked eyes happen to come into direct contact with Lorenzo's.
- A flat-faced, middle-aged man wearing a blue serge suit and sandals who holds a tightly rolled Russian language newspaper, occasionally slapping it impatiently against his open palm. "Sergei!" a frumpily-dressed woman beside him calls out in a hoarse, congested voice. Since she doesn't face her companion when saying this, Lorenzo can't determine precisely who is being addressed. She tugs at the black babushka around her head with one hand while balancing, in the other, a large can with the four-color picture of a sunflower on its side. Thick-set figures in shapeless overcoats hurry past the couple on their square of sidewalk, taking no notice of them. The man and woman seem to be waiting for a bus: they crane their necks in the same direction. They are life-size, however, so the red plastic bus circling Lorenzo's room every fifteen minutes, no bigger than a Pekinese dog, is unable to stop and pick them up.
- A black cast-iron elephant which never moves from its circle of bright yellow light. Around its feet, steam rises from a grating in the floor and evaporates in the air, as from city streets after rain. Originally the elephant was an opaque presence in his room, but soon patches of reddish-brown rust

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formed on its flanks; they glowed in the spotlight like nebulous masses of floating algae. As oxidation from the steam continued, the corrosion began to take on shapes which stood out more and more clearly, and Lorenzo found himself being treated to a visual primer on evolution. Mutating animal life progressed from simple to sophisticated forms: at present, Lorenzo is looking at a stocky man naked to the waist who wears a crumpled fedora and brandishes a handgun. With the appearance of this man, Lorenzo's elephant has briefly come alive: the trunk jerks restively, the tail crackles with pent-up energy, he can see sweat on its shoulders and smell its mustiness. The compact man with dusty, sweat-stained body and powerful hands, perhaps the animal's trainer, raises his revolver and aims it at Lorenzo's calm, attentive face.

• An olive-green, commercial size, twin washer-dryer appliance. The completion of its wash cycle is followed by five minutes of silence, whereupon the half-hour cycle of the dryer begins. The water gurgling through its system reminds Lorenzo of a swiftly flowing mountain stream. The dryer has its own sound, as well: nests being constructed by a swarm of hyperactive blackbirds. As dramatically as in a department store window, after the appliance shuts down the door of the dryer flies open revealing a yellow shirtsleeve, while a puddle of dirty water spreads across the floor from underneath the washer. At this point, overhead fluorescent light fixtures short out, crackling and fizzing, and he looks on in fascination as irregularly illuminated reflections from the other things in his room ripple across the surface of the water. The smell of the sea reaches him, and he shudders involuntarily. He feels like getting out of bed and going down to the street—he sees himself striding along Twenty-eighth Street, startled by the reflection of his face in shopwindows—but this restlessness soon passes and he settles back against his pillow with a deep exhalation of breath.

• An elaborately equipped fish tank on a long metal stand, in its variety and size suggesting a municipal aquarium. Well-stocked with tropical fish, the tank includes small men and women in wet suits, occasionally visible among the

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moss-covered rocks, who are souvenir-hunting by aqualung. The brilliantly colored fish elude them; they must content themselves with collecting bits of coral and exotic, microscopic seashells. Their purposive activity contrasts with that of the fish, which look well-fed, and seem never to be doing anything more than cruising. Above the gentle waves, a rocky coastline along the rear wall of the tank thrusts up colored postcards of rambling old seaside hotels from the turn of the century, structures with extensive balconies and ornately carved eaves. In between these, one or two unattractive modern resorts can be glimpsed, revealing sections of plate glass, cyclone fence, and whitewashed concrete.

- A small portable refrigerator wedged between cupboards in the cramped galley of an ocean-going yacht. The galley sways violently back and forth, the sound of breaking crockery is heard, and finally the door of the refrigerator slams open. Inside is a mason jar with a label affixed to it which reads, "I Will Remember This Moment Forever!" Faint cries of squeamish alarm escape now and then from the jar.

- A dentist's drill, chair, instrument tray and washstand: the entire operating module in white porcelain, complete with towels, clamps, pliers, a trellis-like affair holding rows of dentures, a young, red-haired dental assistant with protruding eyes who appears beside the chair, and the dentist himself. Whenever Lorenzo looks over at the "Dental Corner" of his collection, this dentist—a tall, robust man, tanned and fit—strides busily into the room, clucking and chattering as he stores his set of golf clubs by the washstand, dons a blue nylon smock, and starts preparing little cups of fillings. The assistant beckons to Lorenzo. The dentist smiles gaily, asking after Lorenzo's family. Before receiving a reply he takes up a softly interminable monologue about baseball, politics, the weather, air pollution, racing cars, interest rates, parking permits, *nouvelle cuisine*, and fly casting. On those rare occasions of forgetfulness when, dubiously, Lorenzo eases out of bed and seats himself in the chair, the assistant pounces on him with a hypodermic needle while the dentist holds down his shoulders. Attempting to cry out, Lorenzo is struck by the

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size of the needle and by the fact that the red-haired girl with bulging sea-green eyes makes no attempt to apply the painkiller locally, to the teeth and gums, but instead drills the contents of the ampule directly into his brain. When he regains consciousness sometime later, the dentist and his assistant are gone. The chair, drill, and other equipment gleam silently. Returning to his bed, he leans back on his pillow and stares vacantly across the room, gingerly touching the top of his head, then his jaw and lips.

• Soon, something new catches his eye: ranks of black soldiers who advance, in unending waves, through an African savannah to the distant horizon. They are dressed in tropical uniforms: knee socks, shorts, and starched bush jackets. The only note of color is the red braid visible here and there on shoulders and helmets. The infantrymen's forward progress never slackens or varies, and the sun, although low in the western sky, does not succeed in going down. This continuously extended moment of humanity on the march, breathtaking in its uncompromising severity, instills in Lorenzo a sense of foreboding. Their fury will know no bounds, he thinks, when the members of this army finally realize no orders exist for them to come to a halt. Thorn trees, snakes, insects and wild animals take their toll on the men, so that although battle with an adversary never occurs, the ragged touches of red seen among the smallest and most distant of them—among those in the front lines—forcefully remind Lorenzo of the wounds of war.

• A gymnasium built of cast-iron and glass, whose massive facade gives an impression of grand scale, like a structure housing botanical gardens, or a nineteenth-century Crystal Palace. Visible within its thousands of windows are courts for basketball, handball, and tennis, as well as an eight-lane swimming pool, steam rooms, saunas, and a hardwood running track. Gymnastic equipment stands about: rowing machines, punching bags, trampolines and barbells. The building is animated by a constantly shifting population of dark, mustachioed men, many of them in poor physical condition. In spite of this, however, they run and jump, tug, pull

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and punch in a dedicated manner. Weaving in and out among them are the establishment's attendants, dressed in billowing orange pantaloons, who provide the men with whatever they might need: fresh towels, adhesive tape, snacks, and even cigarettes, which many throughout the hall puff on while they exert themselves. The gymnasium is as busy as an old-time railway station. From what Lorenzo can make out, the men inside it are Bulgarians or Romanians or Turks. Stony-faced with athletic purpose, they persist for hours at a stretch in a slow and stately manner. Once in a while a gymnast pauses to rest, peering out one of the windows in the direction of Lorenzo's bed. At such times he sees a swarthy, phlegmatic-looking man of advanced age, with a long silken mustache and large, sad, purple-rimmed, tobacco-colored eyes. On occasion, when someone stops and looks outside, Lorenzo waves, and even throws bits of balled up paper, but so far he has had no response. The silent figure soon turns away and rejoins his companions.

• Micki Wainwright, American housewife. She sits alone at a breakfast nook in the corner of her suburban kitchen, dressed in a white satin morning coat and slippers, stirring a cup of coffee. She is waiting for someone to join her. Steam rises from her cup, as well as from the full pot of hot coffee on a warming plate in the center of the table. The other cup, resting on its saucer on a yellow plastic placemat, is empty. Macramé wall hangings and potted plants surround the picture window which looks out on her back lawn from above the sink and its spotless drainboard. A red wall phone is installed nearby. Periodically it rings, and she picks up the receiver: "Micki Wainwright speaking," she announces in a self-consciously cheerful voice. Then, after a moment, with a stiffly set smile, she extends the receiver toward Lorenzo, as if inviting him to bear witness, and he hears a dial tone which continues for a short time, until a loud, oscillating whine interrupts it. He makes no move in response. Soon Micki's smile disappears, and an unreadable expression takes its place. She returns the receiver to its cradle on the wall. Her hands shake from the caffeine she has ingested, or from some less apparent

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source, as she pours herself another cup and settles back in her seat to wait.

• A busy office, down a long hallway off a suite of other offices, on the thirty-sixth floor of the Raymer Building north of Madison Square in Manhattan. Within this room, whose doorway looks over desk tops and through a window at vistas of distant metal towers, four women are employed by a large commercial firm. Heavy set, hair streaked with grey, cashmere sweaters draped over their shoulders and wearing eyeglasses attached to gold chains, the women look matronly and self-assured. They have worked together for nearly a decade, but their images of each other are at variance with the images they have of themselves, so that, although they function well professionally, they dislike and distrust each other. Imagined or real slights, plots, and intrigue constitute, in the stream of daily events, a permanent undertow which would go unnoticed by any casual visitor to this cramped, effervescent cubicle. Lorenzo, however, has been an onlooker here for longer than anywhere else in his collection. He has come to know these four women, at least during office hours, virtually as well as they know themselves. Two are black, two white; often they dress in contrasting outfits, the black women wearing white and the white, black. In the complicated games of office politics played among them, sides are frequently, but not always, chosen according to skin color. At such times Lorenzo glimpses, through the open doorway, pairs of matching faces huddled together in conspiracy. A principal cause of friction concerns possession of the favorite desk, situated nearest the window. While the others are preoccupied, one will lay claim to this desk, only to have her belongings removed from it when she steps out of the room, or her chair pulled from under her as she stands talking on the telephone. Pranks, schemes, and sabotage are always in the air, ranging from pilfered apples to attempts at canceling another's salary line. The lengths to which the women go in order to camouflage their intentions, the artfulness with which mischief is concealed in the business at hand, long ago made Lorenzo an ardent fan of this little office, and made of it a

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place he anticipates returning to with enthusiasm, as if to the first day of work at a new job.

• Five blocks of Madison Avenue, from Thirty-fourth Street to Thirty-ninth Street. Lorenzo sees, as he looks up one side of the avenue and down the other, storefronts, office buildings, and a few brownstone houses. He pauses before the grimy gothic-revival Church of the Incarnation Episcopal, on the east side of the avenue between Thirty-fifth and Thirty-sixth Streets, then keeps pace with a group of perspiring high school students in shirtsleeves, carrying satchels of books and wool blazers, as they walk slowly uphill toward the Morgan Library. In the past he often visited this sprawling white marble palazzo, with its collection of rare prints and manuscripts; as he reaches the corner he is tempted to turn off the avenue and walk down Thirty-sixth Street to the entrance. However, he obtains little satisfaction, at present, from viewing such assemblages: they remind him of the mute hoardings of childhood. Instead, he resumes walking north on Madison until he reaches a handsome Victorian brownstone, now the headquarters of the Lutheran Church in America, on the southeast corner of Thirty-seventh Street. This formerly was the residence of J.P. Morgan, Jr., who communicated with the collection he administered at the Library by way of a garden between the two properties. Lorenzo stares intently at this house for some time, memorizing the color of its blocks of stone and graceful first floor windows with their wrought-iron balustrades, allowing himself to see, barely visible between heavy curtains, the face of the long-vanished financier. He then turns away and looks back down Madison Avenue. Clusters of people walk along, leaving doorways, crossing sidewalks, getting into taxis and buses. Lorenzo feels the warm sun on his face. He hears voices of nearby pedestrians and watches the traffic signals changing from red to green, one by one, as automobiles and trucks come toward him up the avenue. It's four o'clock or so on a weekday afternoon in May. Soon the traffic lanes will become congested, and an avalanche of workers from the surrounding buildings will descend into the avenue, pouring along pavements and

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over curbs, buoyant and expansive, joking with one another, full of expectation for the approaching night.

Lorenzo ambles slowly back down Madison. By the time he crosses Thirty-fourth Street he has become aware of feeling lighter than air, of being detached from the crowds of shoppers and increasingly heavy traffic. At the corner of Twenty-eighth Street he turns left and approaches the red canopy over the sidewalk in front of his apartment house. Even though it's been a warm day, now in the late afternoon shadow of the big buildings a cool wind is blowing, and Lorenzo shivers involuntarily. He would be very surprised to learn that the two people standing under the canopy at the curb as he passes by are convinced he is being self-consciously hip when he turns up his white shirt collar against the wind, and the little pointed wings jut forward along the sides of his face. He doesn't notice them smirking at each other as he quickens his pace and strides into the entranceway.

Once inside, he crosses the nondescript lobby and presses the brass knob beside the elevator doors. A bell rings and the metal doors slide open. Nodding hello to an old, small, silver-haired woman with a distracted look under her lilac-colored beret who steps uncertainly out of the elevator, Lorenzo gets inside and pushes the button for the twenty-second floor. Letting himself into his apartment with the single key on a rabbit's foot key ring, he moves from one room to the next, switching on lights. Finally he opens the bedroom door and walks in. He sees himself lying propped up in bed, his arms resting on a yellow wool blanket tucked neatly under the mattress. He is staring fixedly at a bare spot on the hardwood floor, but at the sound of the door being opened he looks up abruptly and peers across the room at the newest member of his collection—the silent figure of Lorenzo, a troubled look on his face, his shirt collar turned up and his hands thrust deep in his pants pockets, standing by the open door.

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Philip Levine

A Poem With No Ending

So many poems begin where they
should end, and never end.
Mine never end, they run on
book after book, complaining
to the moon that heaven is wrong
or dull, no place at all to be.
I believe all this. I believe
that ducks take wing only
in stories and then to return
the gift of flight to the winds.
If you knew how I came to be
seven years old and how thick
and blond my hair was, falling
about my shoulders like the leaves
of the slender eucalyptus
that now blesses my driveway
and shades my pale blue Falcon,
if you could see me pulling
wagon loads of stones across
the tufted fields and placing
them to build myself and my brother
a humped mound of earth where
flowers might rise as from a grave,
you might understand the last spring
before war turned toward our house
and entered before dawn, a pale

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stranger that hovered over each bed
and touched the soft, unguarded faces
leaving bruises so faint
years would pass before they darkened
and finally burned. Now I can sit
calmly over coffee and recover
each season, how the rains swelled
the streets, how at night I mumbled
a prayer because the weight
of snow was too great to bear
as I heard it softly packing
down the roof, how I waited
for hours for some small breeze
to rise from the river dreaming
beside me, and none came, and morning
was so much mist rising
and the long moaning of ore boats
returning the way they'd come,
only now freighted with the earth
someone would carve and cook.
That is the poem I called "Boyhood"
and placed between the smeared pages
of your morning paper. White itself,
it fell on the white tablecloth
and meant so little you turned
it over and wrote a column
of figures you never added up.
You capped your gold fountain pen
and snapped your fingers to remind
yourself of some small, lost event.
My poem remained long after you'd
gone, face down, unread, not even
misunderstood, until it passed,
like its subject, into the literatures
of silence, though hardly first
among them, for there have always
been the tales the water told

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the cup and the words the wind
sang to the windows in those houses
we abandoned after the roads
whispered all night in our ears.

I passed the old house and saw
even from the front that four trees
were gone, and beside the drive
a wire cage held nothing. Once
I stopped and rang the bell.
A woman said, No! before I asked,
and I heard a child say, Who
is he? and I turned away
from so many years and drove off.
Tomorrow my train will leave
the tunnel and rise above this town
and slowly clatter beside block
after block of buildings that fall
open like so many stunned faces
with nothing to hide. The cold odor
of smoke rises and the steeped smell
of wood that will not hold our words.
Once I saw the back of a closet
that burst unto sky, and I imagined
opening a familiar door and stepping
into a little room without limits.
I rose into a blue sky as undefined
as winter and as cold. I said, Oh my!
and held myself together with a wish!
No, that wasn't childhood, that
was something else, something
that ended in a single day and left
no residue of happiness I could
reach again if I took the first turn
to the left and eyes closed walked
a hundred and one steps and spoke
the right words.

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I sit for days
staring at the dusty window
and no word comes to tell me what I
left behind. Still, I regret nothing,
not the little speeches I wrote
to the moon on the warm spring nights
I searched for someone other
than myself and came home empty
at sun-up among bird calls
and the faint prattle of rain.
I do not regret my hands
changing before me, mottling
like the first eggs I found
in the fields of junked cars,
nor my breath that still comes
and comes no matter what I command
and the words that go out
and fall short. I can hear
my heart beating, slowly,
I can feel the blood sliding
behind my eyes, so I close them
first on a known darkness and then
on a red crown forming as from
a dark sea, and I am beginning
once more to rise into the shape
of someone I can be, a man
no different from my father
but slower and wiser. What could be
better than to waken as a man?

I began as you did, smaller
than the wren who circled three times
and flew back into the darkness
before sleep. I was born
of the promise that each night
made and each day broke, out
of the cat's sullen wish to remain

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useless and proud and the sunlight's
to find a closed face to waken.
Out of just that and no more.
The tiny stories my grandpa
told in which dogs walked upright
and the dead laughed. I was born
of these and his pocket of keys,
his dresser drawers of black socks
and white shirts, his homilies
of blood and water, all he never
gave me and all he did. Small
and dying he opened his eyes
unto a certain day, unto
stale water and old shoes,
and he never prayed. I could say
that was the finished poem and gather
my few things into a dark suitcase
and go quietly into the streets and wait.
It will be Sunday, and no one will pass.
In the long shadows of the warehouses
it's cool and pleasant. A piece of paper
skips by, but I don't bend to it
or tip my hat.

I hear the shouts
of children at play. Sunday afternoon
in August of '36, and the darkness
falls between us on the little island
where we came year after year
to celebrate the week. First I can't
see you, my brother, but I can hear
your labored breathing beside me,
and then my legs vanish, and then
my hands, and I am only a presence
in long grass. Then I am grass
blowing in a field all night, giving
and taking so many green gifts

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of the earth and touching everything.
I never wakened from that evening.
The island still rides the river
between two countries. The playground—
yellowed and shrunken—, the rotunda
falling in upon itself, the old
huddled at separate tables and staring
off into the life they've come to.
In this place and at this time,
which is not time, I could take
the long road back and find it all.
I could even find myself. (Writing
this, I know it's not true.)

On Monday morning across the way
the trucks load up with parcels
of everything. This is New York City
in mid-May of 1981, and I am too old
to live that life again, packing
the van with frozen fish, household
goods, oriental vegetables, wristwatches,
weightless cartons of radium. That was
thirty years ago in another town,
and I still recall the mixture
of weariness and excitement as I beheld
the little mound of what was mine
to take into the world. (They had given
me a cap with a shining badge
and a huge revolver to guard
"the valuables." I hid them both
under the seat.) On the near West Side
in a two-room walk-up apartment
a dazed couple sat waiting for weeks
for a foot locker full of clothes
and kitchen utensils. They stood back
when I entered, pretending to be busy,
and they tried to keep me there,

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but they had nothing to say. They were
neither young nor old, and I couldn't
then imagine their days in which little
or nothing was done, days on which it
seemed important to smoke before
dressing and not to go out until
late afternoon. I couldn't imagine
who they were and why they'd come
from all the small far-off places
to be homeless where I was homeless.
In another house an old man summoned
me to a high room. There before us
was a massive steamer trunk full
of books he could take back home
to Germany now he could return.
Tolstoi, Balzac, Goethe, all
in the original. Oh yes, I knew
the names, and he called down
to his wife, how wonderful!
This boy knows the names. He brought
the top down carefully, turned the key,
and stepped back, waiting for me
to carry it down three flights
by myself and offered me money
when I couldn't budge it, as though
I'd been pretending. This boy,
this American, in his pressed
work clothes, surely he could do it,
surely there was a way, if only
I would try. I left him shaking
his great head and passed his wife
on the stairs, a little brown mouse
of a woman laughing at such folly.

The memory of rain falling slowly
into the dark streets and the smell
of a new season rising above

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the trucks parked in silent rows.
Even without earth or snow melting
or new grass rising into moonlight,
the year is turning, and the streets
can feel it. I dreamed this,
or I lived it for a moment, waking
in the night to no bird song
or wind pull, waking to no one
beside me asking for water
or a child calling from another room.
Awake now for a second or a lifetime,
I'm once again stepping out onto
the tiny veranda above the railyards
of Sevilla. In the room next door
a soldier has dressed a chair
with his uniform and leaned his rifle
against the glass door. A woman's clothes
are scattered on the floor. I look away.
Christmas, 1965. The halls of this hotel
are filled with sleeping peasants.
Each of my three sons is alone
in a narrow room with no windows,
asleep in a darkness beyond darkness,
and I feel their loneliness and fear.
Below the window, the lights
of the railyard flash this way
and that, and an old engine is firing up.
Distant voices speak out, but I can't
understand their words. I am falling
toward sleep again. For a moment
I feel my arms spread wide to enclose
everyone within these walls whitewashed
over and over, my own sons, my woman,
and all the other sons and daughters
stretched out or curled up in bad beds
or on bare floors, their heads
pillowed on their own hard arms

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their cheeks darkened by cheap newsprint.
There is a song, bird song or wind song,
or the song old rooms sing when no one
is awake to hear. For a moment I
almost catch the melody we make
with bare walls, old iron sagging beds,
and scarred floors. There is one
deep full note for each of us.
This is the first night of my life
I know we are music.

Across the world
in the high mountains of the West,
I had gone one Sunday
with my youngest son, Teddy.
We parked the car and climbed
from the road's end over a rise
of young pines and then descended
slowly for a mile or more
through a meadow of wild flowers
still blooming in July. The yellow
ones that reached to his shoulders
stained my legs with pollen.
As we walked he spoke of animals
with the gift of speech. Bears,
he told me, were especially fond
of young people, and the mother bears
were known for coming into towns
like ours to steal boys and girls
and bring them back up here and teach
them hunting, and the children
grew into animals and forgot
their homes and their brothers.
A slight rise, and we entered
a thick forest. The air was still
and damp, and there was no longer
any trail. Soon I lost my way.

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In a small clearing we stopped
to have our sandwiches, and I cooled
the soda pop in a stream whose rushing
we'd heard from far off. His head
pillowed on his jacket, he lay out,
eyes closed, the long dark lashes
quivering in sunlight, the cheeks
brown and smooth. When I awoke
he was throwing rocks as large
as he could manage into the stream
where they banged down a stairway
of stone and came to rest. The sun
had shifted, the shadows fell
across our faces, and it was cooler.
He was building a house, he said,
below the water, dark now, and boiling.
I bet him he couldn't lead us back
the way we'd come through the dark
bear woods and across the great plain
and up and down these hills.
A dollar? he said. Yes. And talking
all the way, he took the lead,
switching a fallen branch before him
to dub this little tree as friend
or a tall weed as enemy, stopping once
to uproot a purple wildflower for me.

I reenter a day in a late summer,
the heat going from the streets
and the cramped downriver flats, a day
of departures and farewells, for I
too am going, packing my box
of books and my typewriter and heading
West this time. So it seems
that all of us are on the move,
giving up these jobs that gave us
just enough and took all we had.

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Going back to the little hollows
we'd come away from when the land
gave out or going back
to the survivors left in Alabama
or farther back to the villages
of Greece and Italy. From all
of these people I take a drink,
a pastry, and a coin to insure
a safe voyage, and we shake hands
around the battered kitchen tables.
Sometimes the old ones turn away
before I leave and cry without sound
or sometimes a man touches
his wife, but more often each stands
alone and silent in the old pain.

How many lives were torn apart
in those years? How many young men
went off as ours did but never
came back. It was still dark when we
drove into the great harbor and found
the ship to Sweden and said goodbye
not knowing what it was we said.
We saw him climb the gangplank
loaded down with duffle bags
and a guitar he scarcely played.
We turned back to the city
unable to face each other,
unable to face the coming day.
The sun shone on trams and markets,
and until late afternoon I tramped
the streets no longer looking for
the face I sought in childhood,
for now that face was mine, and I
was old enough to know
that my son would not suddenly
turn a corner and be mine

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as I was my father's son.
A woman came out of a bar
screaming at her man, and he
hurried silently beside me
and darted quickly down an alley.
When I turned the woman's face
was smeared with tears. She shook
a finger at me and damned me
in her tongue. That night I
slept alone and dreamed of finding
my way back to the house where I
was born. It was quiet when I
entered, for no one has risen yet,
and I climbed the steps to my room
where nothing stirred in all
the rooms beneath me. I slept
fully dressed, stretched out
on a tiny bed, a boy's bed,
and in that dream more vivid
than the waking from it, the rooms
were one and I was home at last.

To get west you go east.
You leave in the dark
by car and drive until you
can't and sleep by the road
for an hour or a moment.
If the windshield is crystalled
when you waken you know
the days will be getting
colder and shorter. If you
wake soaked with sweat
then the year is turning
toward summer. None of
it matters at all, the towns
you travel through, plunging
down hills and over the cobbles

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and the twisting tight passageways
and breaking for the open fields,
the apple orchards and the barns
rotting and fallen, none of it
matters to you. No one
you know dreams these houses
or hides here from the rain.
When the long day turns
to dark and you're nowhere
you've ever been before, you
keep going, and the magic eyes
that gleam by the roadside
are those of animals come
down from the invisible hills.
Yes, they have something to tell
or something to give you
from the world you've lost.
If you stopped the car and let
the engine idle and walked
slowly toward them, one hand
held out in greeting, you
would find only a fence post
bullet-scarred and deckled with
red-eyed reflectors. None
of it matters, so just keep going,
forward or back, until you've
found the place or the place
doesn't matter. They were only
animals come down to stand
in silent formation by a road
you traveled.

Early March.
The cold beach deserted. My kids
home in a bare house, bundled up
and listening to rock music
pirated from England. My wife

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waiting for me in the bar, alone
for an hour over her sherry, and none
of us knows why I have to pace
back and forth on this flat
and birdless stretch of gleaming sand
while the violent air shouts
out its rags of speech. I recall
the calm warm sea of Florida
30 years ago, and my brother
and I staring out in the hope
that someone known and loved
would return out of air and water
and no more, a miracle a kid
could half-believe, could see
as something everyday and possible.
Later I slept alone and dreamed
of the home I never had and wakened
in the dark. A silver light sprayed
across the bed, and the little
rented room ticked toward dawn.
I did not rise. I did not go
to the window and address
the moon. I did not cry
or cry out against the hour
or the loneliness that still
was mine, for I had grown
into the man I am, and I
knew better. A sudden voice
calls out my name or a name
I think is mine. I turn.
The waves have darkened; the sky's
descending all around me. I read
once that the sea would come
to be the color of heaven.
They would be two seas tied
together, and between the two
a third, the sea of my own heart.

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I read and believed nothing.
This little beach at the end
of the world is anywhere, and I
stand in a stillness that will last
forever or until the first light
breaks beyond these waters. Don't
be scared, the book said, don't flee
as wave after wave the breakers rise
in darkness toward their ghostly crests,
for he has set a limit to the sea
and he is at your side. The sea
and I breathe in and out as one.
Maybe this is done at last
or for now, this search for what
is never here. Maybe all that
ancient namesake sang is true.
The voice I hear now is
my own night voice, going out
and coming back in an old chant
that calms me, that calms
—for all I know—the waves
still lost out there.

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Portfolio

There is Only One Clique and You Are the Only One

Mark Kostabi

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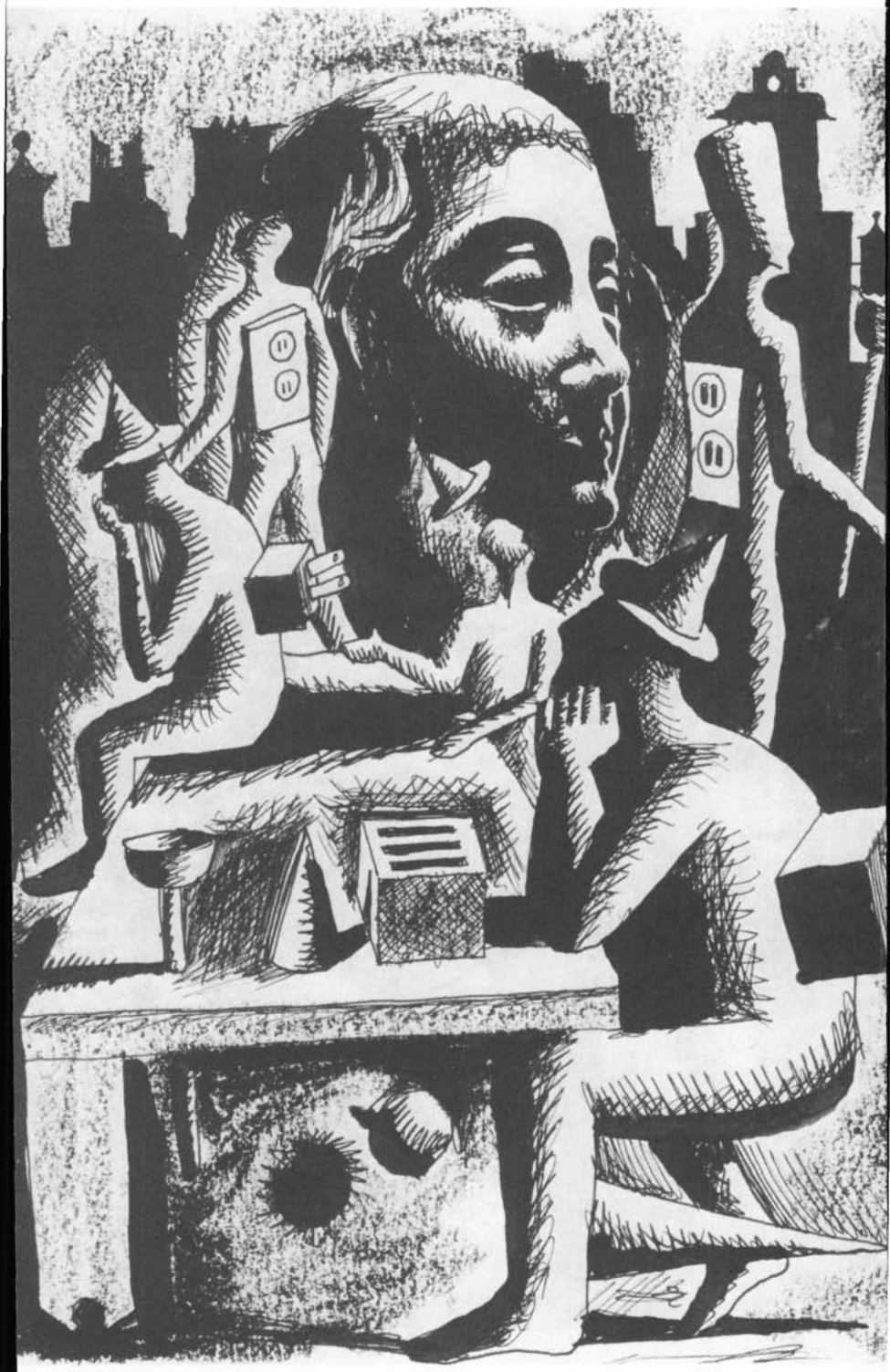

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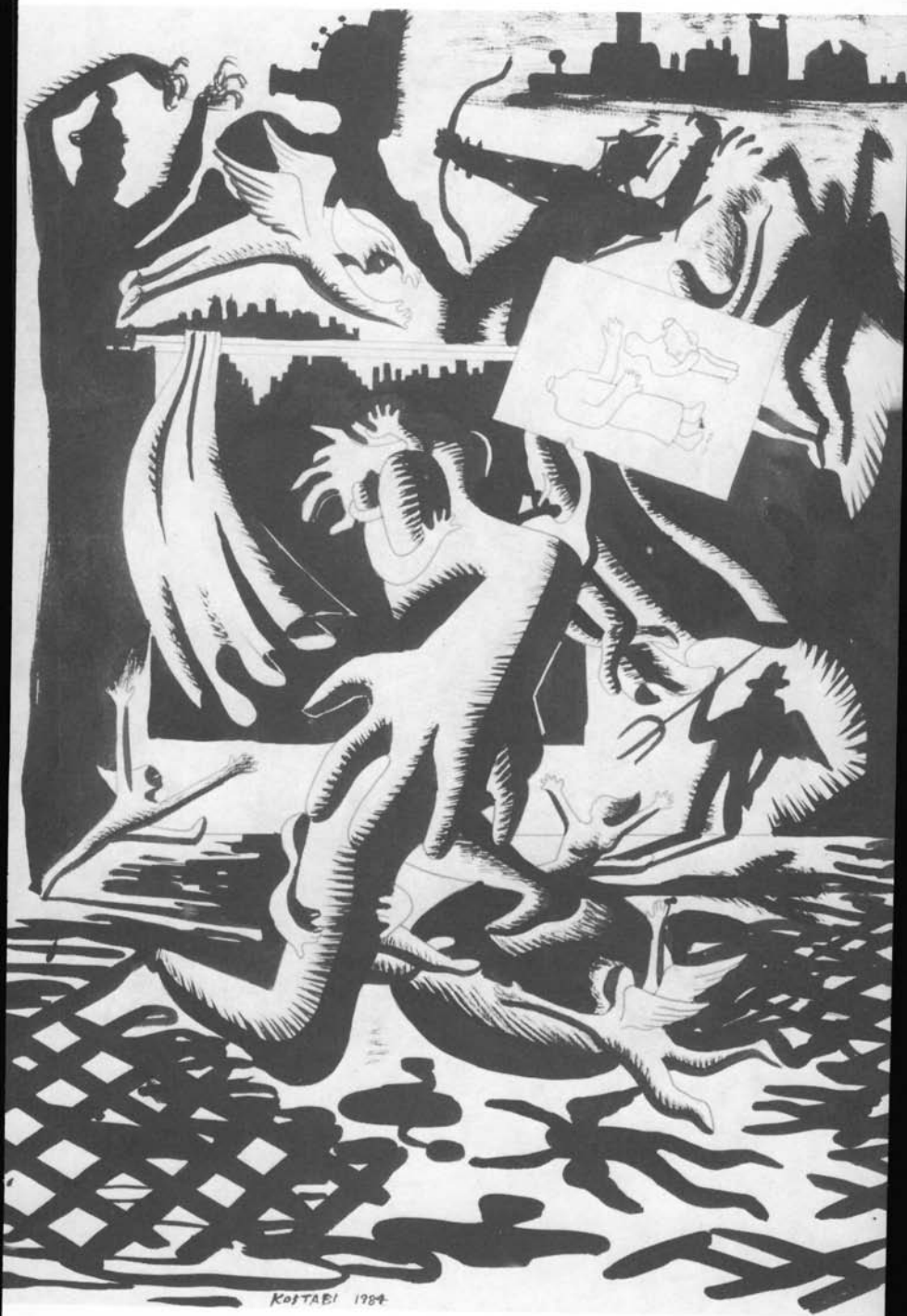

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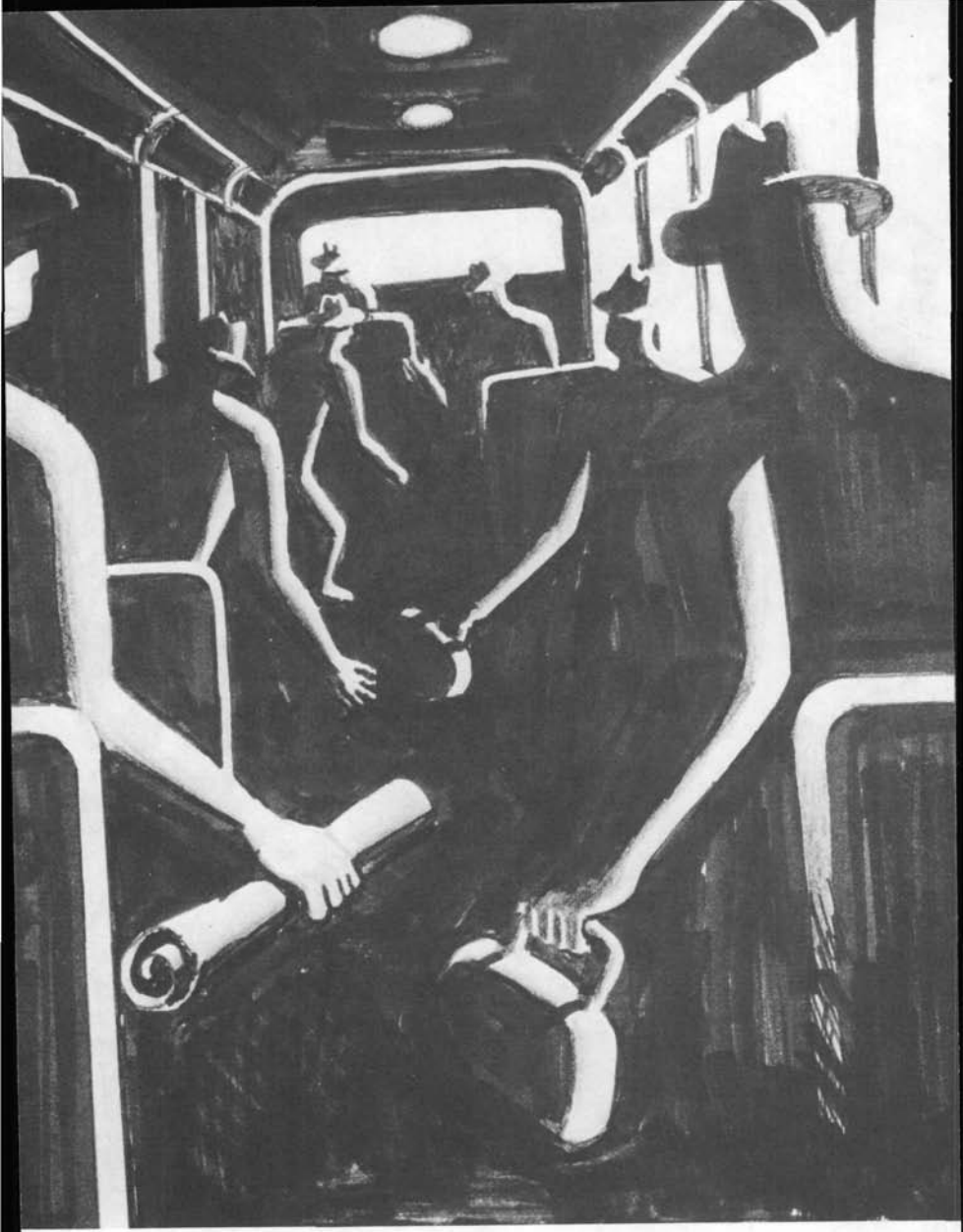

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Two Stories by Ron Padgett

Monsieur Jim

It was an early spring late afternoon. It had been raining, and the cobblestone "streets" of Père Lachaise cemetery were still wet. The sky looked all grey and wet too, just beautiful. The pale yellow map in my hand showed the grave sites of famous people, printed in black ink. You want to see the tomb of Heloise and Abelard? Go to division seven. Molière? Balzac? Chopin? Sarah Bernhardt? Then, handwritten, in blue ink that bled into the paper, were two names, with fat dots marking their sites: "Piaf" and "Jim."

Piaf. I remembered that rabid fans came every day from all over the world to put fresh flowers on the grave, to stand reverently in her presence. A cult. Yes, I could understand that. She was a legend, a star.

But what about this "Jim," with his Anglo-Saxon name? I said it aloud: "Zheem." It rang no bells. "Zheem."

A couple of hundred yards later I noticed a young man in blue jeans standing on crutches at the cemetery intersection ahead. He had long red hair and a red beard. Aside from the

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crutches he was just one of those guys. I wasn't surprised when he spoke to me.

"Pardon, monsieur, est-ce que vous connaissez où se trouve la tombe de Jim?"

"En effet, oui," I said, surprised that I did. "C'est indiquée ici sur la carte."

I pointed to the fat dot with "Jim" next to it.

"Vous allez tout droit et puis vous tournez à gauche. Ce n'est pas loin."

"De par là?" he pointed.

"Oui, et puis vous tournez à gauche."

"Merci beaucoup, monsieur."

"Non, non, ce n'est rien."

He rotated on his crutches.

"Excusez-moi," I stopped him, "ce Monsieur Jim, c'est qui exactement?"

He looked deep into my eyes and with utterly reverent sobriety said, "Jim Morrison."

Then he slowly lurched on down the wet cobblestones toward his place of worship, and I toward mine.

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My Room

For many years I had wanted to have a room of my own in a house of my own making, and when the opportunity came I went ahead and did it. I built the room the way I wanted it, rough, clean, wooden. It surpassed my dream—it was a form of paradise. I came in and admired it. Then I went out. I put things in the room and then went out. I looked in from time to time, from the hall, as if to see if I had arrived yet in the room.

I began to wonder. Maybe this wasn't exactly what I had had in mind. I grew disgruntled. The room looked dark and mournful, as if someone had died in it.

Then I rushed in, rearranged the furniture, hung pictures on the walls, and tossed out all junk. Suddenly I could feel the electrical paths in the walls, and the nails holding like guardians against destruction and chaos. And a delicious sadness for the objects comes over me.

The desk lamp, for instance. My friend Ted Berrigan stole it from the dormitory room he was being lodged in at the University of Michigan, where he was giving a series of poetry

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readings, as was I. Shortly after his return to New York he received a letter from a dormitory official, taking him to task for stealing the lamp. Actually it was a letter I concocted using stationery I had taken from my dorm room. I got a good laugh out of this practical joke. Until Ted wrote to the school, apologizing for his behavior and saying many other things. Fearing the joke had gone too far, I confessed. But Ted had the last laugh—he gave *me* the lamp for my birthday. How many years ago? The original event plunges deeper into the smoky past, but sometimes flashes forward into the present and the memory hits me and I look at the lamp and feel this mellowing sadness that seems to be sinking into, surprisingly, my arms and legs, which for some reason leads me to the idea that memories come from deep inside our spirits, flash past our brains, and dissipate into our extremities.

This is what happened to the Latin language. It flashed from our predecessors, through our high school students, and is now fizzling out on the edge of our culture. In two days my wife, son, and I will begin a private, family Latin class, with my old textbook, *Using Latin*, and its astounding opening sentence, "America est patria mea." Who the hell could care less! But it is a classic case, a strange hybrid of language study and propaganda. At least it fulfills the promise of the title: you can study Lesson One and walk out in the street and exclaim, "America est patria mea!" Sort of like giving yourself Roman citizenship when in fact you are a happily crazed Nubian they call Spook, and you cannot understand the color illustrations in the textbook: dragon teeth sown in the earth immediately turned into armed warriors. At that dark moment the tree in the front yard was thrashing in the storm.

I can hear a brook from my window now, and I think of it running into the little spot we call Wayne Pond, named after my son, who was named after my father. All this confluence in a room I didn't feel comfortable in until a few minutes ago, a room that, broken like a mustang, becomes a friend to man, we who are so desperately in need of friends among the plants and animals of this earth, and yes, the humans too, and the rooms we build around ourselves.

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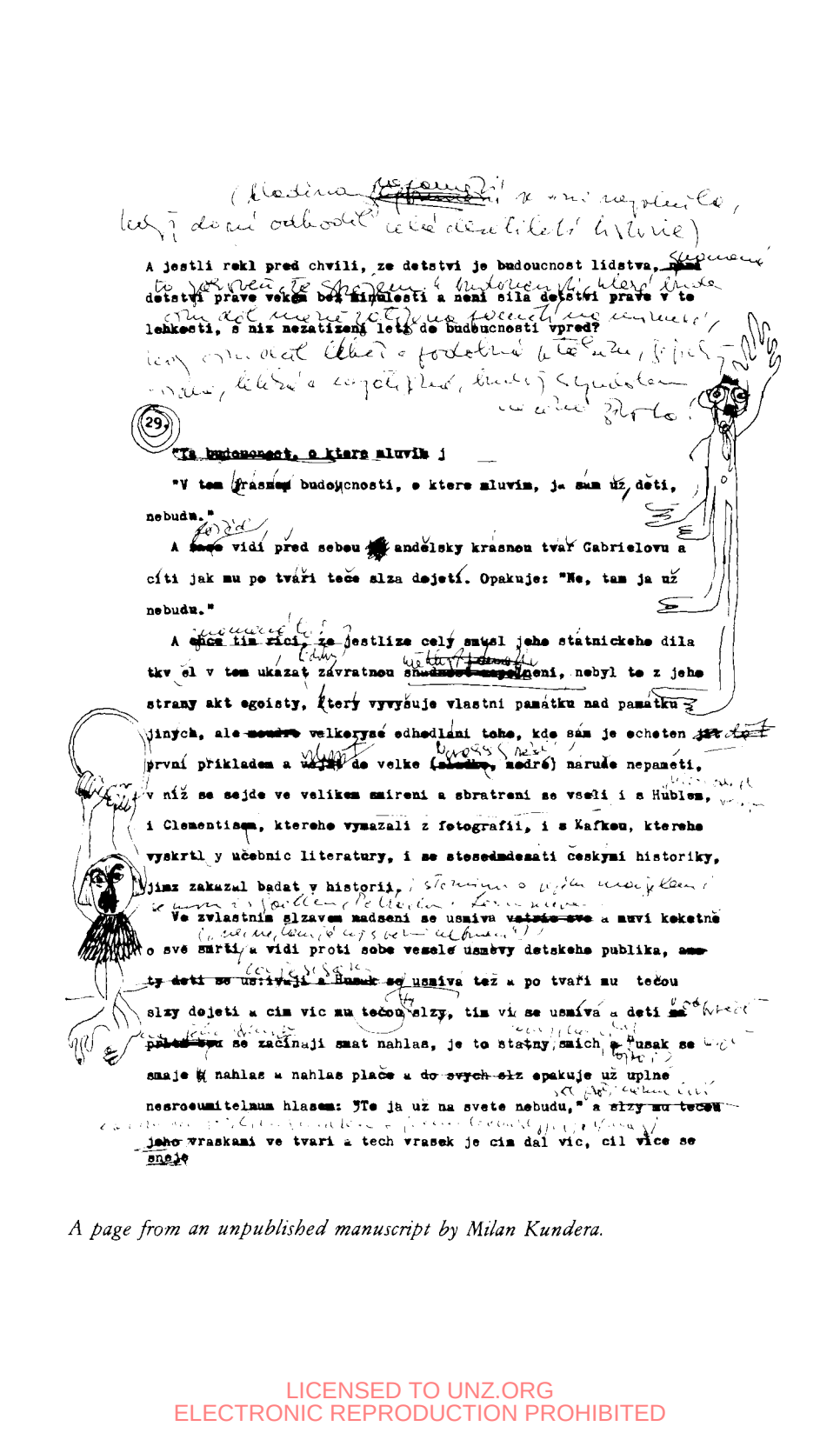

A jestli řekl před chvílí, že dětství je budoucnost lidstva, ~~že~~ dětství právě věkem bez viny a není síla dětství právě v té lehkosti, s níž nezatížení letí do budoucnosti vpřed?

29

"Ta budoucnost, o které mluvíš já —

"V tom krásném budoucnosti, o které mluvím, já sám už děti, nebudu."

A ~~když~~ vidí před sebou ~~ji~~ andělsky krásnou tvář Gabrielovu a cítí jak mu po tváři teče slza dojetí. Opakuje: "Ne, tam já už nebudu."

A ~~když~~ tím říci, že jestliže celý smysl jeho státnického díla ~~tkv~~ el v tom ukázat závratnou ~~snadnost~~ zapomenutí, nebyl to z jeho strany akt egoisty, který vyvyšuje vlastní památku nad památku jiných, ale ~~moudrý~~ velkorysé odhodlání toho, kdo sám je ochoten ~~jít~~ ~~to~~ první příkladem a ~~vejít~~ do velké (slavné, ~~moudré~~) náruče nepaměti, v níž se sejde ve velikém smíření a sbratření se všemi i s Hublem, i Clementisem, kterého vymazali z fotografií, i s Kafkou, kterého vyškrtl z učebnic literatury, i se stosedmdesáti českými historiky, jimž zakázal bádat v historii,

Ve zvláštním slzavém nadšení se usmívá ~~vstříc své~~ a mluví koketně o své smrti a vidí proti sobě veselé úsměvy dětského publika, ~~ty děti se usmívají a Husák se~~ usmívá též a po tváři mu tečou slzy dojetí a čím víc mu tečou slzy, tím víc se usmívá a děti ~~na~~ ~~počátku~~ ~~tiše~~ se začínají smát nahlas, je to ~~statný~~ smích a Husák se smaje ~~tiše~~ nahlas a nahlas pláče a do ~~svých~~ slz opakuje už úplně nesrozumitelným hlasem: "Já už na světě nebudu," a slzy mu tečou ~~jeho~~ vráskami ve tvari a tech vrásek je čím dál víc, čím více se smeje

A page from an unpublished manuscript by Milan Kundera.

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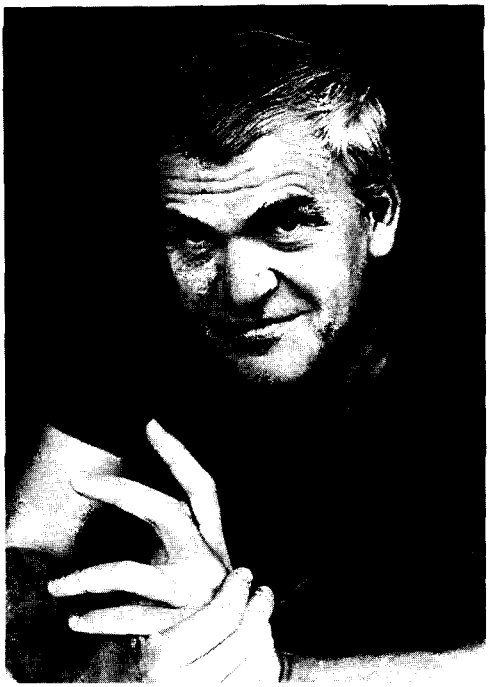

Photo: Aaron Manheimer

The Art of Fiction LXXXI

Milan Kundera

This interview is a product of several encounters with Milan Kundera in Paris in the fall of 1983. Our meetings took place in his attic apartment near Montparnasse. We worked in the small room that Kundera uses as his office. With its shelves full of books on philosophy and musicology, an old-fashioned typewriter and a table, it looks more like a student's room than like the study of a world-famous author. On one of the walls, two photographs hang side by side: one of his father, a pianist, the other of Leoš Janáček, a Czech composer whom he greatly admires.

We held several free and lengthy discussions in French; in-

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stead of a tape recorder, we used a typewriter, scissors and glue. Gradually, amid discarded scraps of paper and after several revisions, this text emerged.

Kundera hates to talk about himself. Journalists who want to tell the story of his life inevitably wind up repeating the same facts. He was born in Brno, Czechoslovakia, in 1929. A student when the Communist regime came into power in 1948, he later worked as a laborer and as a jazz musician before deciding to devote himself to literature and film. He taught at the film school in Prague, where his students were the filmmakers of the Czech New Wave. His first novel, The Joke, *was a tremendous success, and won the award of the Czech Writers Union in 1968.*

But 1968 was also the year of the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia. Kundera lost his teaching job; it was impossible for him to find work of any kind; all his books vanished from the libraries. While one of the darkest chapters in his country's history, for Kundera, excluded from public life, it was a very productive period: he wrote two novels, Life is Elsewhere *and* The Farewell Party. *Since the banning of his books in Czechoslovakia, his books have first appeared in French translation. In 1975, he finally chose exile in France, where he had been offered a position as a Professor of Literature at the University of Rennes. With the publication of* The Book of Laughter and Forgetting, *the Czech government revoked his citizenship; he became a French citizen some years later.*

His latest book, The Unbearable Lightness of Being, *immediately became a bestseller. Today, he is probably the most quoted and discussed writer in France. But this sudden fame makes him uncomfortable; he would surely agree with Malcolm Lowry that "success is like a horrible disaster, worse than a fire in one's home. Fame consumes the home of the soul." Once, when I asked him about some of the comments on his novel that were appearing in the press, he replied, "I've had an overdose of myself!"*

Kundera's wish not to talk about himself seems to be an instinctive reaction against the tendency of most critics to study the writer, and the writer's personality, politics, and pri-

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vate life, instead of the writer's works. "Disgust at having to talk about oneself is what distinguishes novelistic talent from lyric talent," Kundera told Le Nouvel Observateur.

Refusing to talk about oneself is therefore a way of placing literary works and forms squarely at the center of attention, and of focussing on the novel itself. That is the purpose of this discussion on the art of composition.

INTERVIEWER

You have said that you feel closer to the Viennese novelists Robert Musil and Hermann Broch than to any other authors in modern literature. Broch thought—as you do—that the age of the psychological novel had come to an end. He believed, instead, in what he called the "polyhistorical" novel.

MILAN KUNDERA

Musil and Broch saddled the novel with enormous responsibilities. They saw it as the supreme intellectual synthesis, the last place where man could still question the world as a whole. They were convinced that the novel had tremendous synthetic power, that it could be poetry, fantasy, philosophy, aphorism, and essay all rolled into one. In his letters, Broch makes some profound observations on this issue. However, it seems to me that he obscures his own intentions by using the ill-chosen term "polyhistorical novel." It was in fact Broch's compatriot, Adalbert Stifter, a classic of Austrian prose, who created a truly polyhistorical novel in his *Der Nachsommer* (Indian summer), published in 1857. The novel is famous: Nietzsche considered it to be one of the four greatest works of German literature. Today, it is unreadable. It's packed with information about geology, botany, zoology, the crafts, painting, and architecture; but this gigantic, uplifting encyclopedia virtually leaves out man himself, and his situation. Precisely because it *is* polyhistorical, *Der Nachsommer* totally lacks what makes the novel special. This is not the case with Broch. On the contrary! He strove to discover "that which the novel alone can discover." The specific object of what Broch

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liked to call "novelistic knowledge" is existence. In my view, the word "polyhistorical" must be defined as "that which brings together every device and every form of knowledge in order to *shed light on existence*." Yes, I do feel close to such an approach.

INTERVIEWER

A long essay you published in the magazine *Le Nouvel Observateur* caused the French to rediscover Broch. You speak highly of him, and yet you are also critical. At the end of the essay, you write: "All great works, (just because they *are* great) are partly incomplete."

KUNDERA

Broch is an inspiration to us not only because of what he accomplished, but also because of all that he aimed at and could not attain. The very incompleteness of his work can help us understand the need for new art forms, including: (1) a radical stripping away of unessentials (in order to capture the complexity of existence in the modern world without a loss of architectonic clarity); (2) "novelistic counterpoint" (to unite philosophy, narrative, and dream into a single music); (3) the specifically novelistic essay (in other words, instead of claiming to convey some apodictic message, remaining hypothetical, playful, or ironic).

INTERVIEWER

These three points seem to capture your entire artistic program.

KUNDERA

In order to make the novel into a polyhistorical illumination of existence, you need to master the technique of ellipsis, the art of condensation. Otherwise, you fall into the trap of endless length. Musil's *The Man Without Qualities* is one of the two or three novels that I love most. But don't ask me to admire its gigantic unfinished expanse! Imagine a castle so huge that the eye cannot take it all in at a glance. Imagine

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a string quartet that last nine hours. There are anthropological limits—human proportions—that should not be breached, such as the limits of memory. When you have finished reading, you should still be able to remember the beginning. If not, the novel loses its shape, its "architectonic clarity" becomes murky.

INTERVIEWER

The Book of Laughter and Forgetting is made up of seven parts. If you had dealt with them in a less elliptical fashion, you could have written seven different full-length novels.

KUNDERA

But if I had written seven independent novels, I would have lost the most important thing: I wouldn't have been able to capture the "complexity of human existence in the modern world" in a single book. The art of ellipsis is absolutely essential. It requires that one always go directly to the heart of things. In this connection, I always think of a Czech composer I have passionately admired since childhood: Leoš Janáček. He is one of the greatest masters of modern music. His determination to strip music to its essentials was revolutionary. Of course, every musical composition involves a great deal of technique: exposition of the themes, their development, variations, polyphonic work (often very automatic), filling in the orchestration, the transitions, etc. Today one can compose music with a computer, but the computer always existed in composers' heads—if they had to, composers could write sonatas without a single original idea, just by "cybernetically" expanding on the rules of composition. Janáček's purpose was to destroy this computer! Brutal juxtaposition instead of transitions; repetition instead of variation—and always straight to the heart of things: only the note with something essential to say is entitled to exist. It is nearly the same with the novel; it too is encumbered by "technique," by rules that do the author's work for him: present a character, describe a milieu, bring the action into its historical setting, fill up the lifetime of the characters with useless episodes. Every change of scene

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requires new expositions, descriptions, explanations. My purpose is like Janacek's: to rid the novel of the automatism of novelistic technique, of novelistic word-spinning.

INTERVIEWER

The second art form you mentioned was "novelistic counterpoint."

KUNDERA

The idea of the novel as a great intellectual synthesis almost automatically raises the problem of "polyphony." This problem still has to be resolved. Take the third part of Broch's novel *The Sleepwalkers*; it is made up of five heterogeneous elements: (1) "novelistic" narrative based on the three main characters: Pasenow, Esch, Huguenau; (2) the personal story of Hanna Wendling; (3) factual description of life in a military hospital; (4) a narrative (partly in verse) of a Salvation Army girl; (5) a philosophical essay (written in scientific language) on the debasement of values. Each part is magnificent. Yet despite the fact that they are all dealt with simultaneously, in constant alternation (in other words, in a polyphonic manner), the five elements remain disunited—in other words, they do not constitute a *true* polyphony.

INTERVIEWER

By using the metaphor of polyphony and applying it to literature, do you not in fact make demands on the novel that it cannot possibly live up to?

KUNDERA

The novel can incorporate outside elements in two ways. In the course of his travels, Don Quixote meets various characters who tell him their tales. In this way, independent stories are inserted into the whole, fitted into the frame of the novel. This type of composition is often found in seventeenth and eighteenth-century novels. Broch, however, instead of fitting the story of Hanna Wendling into the main story of Esch and Huguenau, lets both unfold *simultaneously.* Sartre

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(in *The Reprieve*), and Dos Passos before him, also used this technique of simultaneity. Their aim, however, was to bring together different novelistic stories, in other words, homogeneous rather than heterogeneous elements as in the case of Broch. Moreover, their use of this technique strikes me as too mechanical and devoid of poetry. I cannot think of better terms than "polyphony" or "counterpoint" to describe this form of composition and, futhermore, the musical analogy is a useful one. For instance, the first thing that bothers me about the third part of *The Sleepwalkers* is that the five elements are not all equal. Whereas the equality of all the voices in musical counterpoint is the basic ground-rule, the *sine qua non*. In Broch's work, the first element (the novelistic narrative of Esch and Huguenau) takes up much more physical space than the other elements, and, even more important, it is privileged insofar as it is linked to the two preceding parts of the novel and therefore assumes the task of unifying it. It therefore attracts more attention and threatens to turn the other elements into mere accompaniment. The second thing that bothers me is that though a fugue by Bach cannot do without any one of its voices, the story of Hanna Wendling or the essay on the decline of values could very well stand alone as an independent work. Taken separately, they would lose nothing of their meaning or of their quality.

In my view, the basic requirements of novelistic counterpoint are: (1) the equality of the various elements; (2) the indivisibility of the whole. I remember that the day I finished "The Angels," part three of *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*, I was terribly proud of myself. I was sure that I had discovered the key to a new way of putting together a narrative. The text was made up of the following elements: (1) an anecdote about two female students and their levitation; (2) an autobiographical narrative; (3) a critical essay on a feminist book; (4) a fable about an angel and the devil; (5) a dream narrative of Paul Eluard flying over Prague. None of these elements could exist without the others, each one illuminates and explains the others as they all explore a single theme and ask a single question: "What is an angel?"

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Part six, also entitled "The Angels," is made up of: (1) a dream-narrative of Tamina's death; (2) an autobiographical narrative of my father's death; (3) musicological reflections; (4) reflections on the epidemic of forgetting that is devastating Prague. What is the link between my father and the torturing of Tamina by children? It is "the meeting of a sewing machine and an umbrella" on the table of one theme, to borrow Lautréamont's famous image. Novelistic polyphony is poetry much more than technique. I can find no example of such polyphonic poetry elsewhere in literature, but I have been very astonished by Alain Resnais's latest films. His use of the art of counterpoint is admirable.

INTERVIEWER

Counterpoint is less apparent in *The Unbearable Lightness of Being.*

KUNDERA

That was my aim. There, I wanted dream, narrative, and reflection to flow together in an indivisible and totally natural stream. But the polyphonic character of the novel is very striking in part six: the story of Stalin's son, theological reflections, a political event in Asia, Franz's death in Bangkok and Tomas's funeral in Bohemia are all linked by the same everlasting question: "What is kitsch?" This polyphonic passage is the pillar that supports the entire structure of the novel. It is the key to the secret of its architecture.

INTERVIEWER

By calling for "a specifically novelistic essay," you expressed several reservations about the essay on the debasement of values which appeared in *The Sleepwalkers.*

KUNDERA

It is a terrific essay!

INTERVIEWER

You have doubts about the way it is incorporated into the

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novel. Broch relinquishes none of his scientific language, he expresses his views in a straightforward way without hiding behind one of his characters—the way Mann or Musil would do. Isn't that Broch's real contribution, his new challenge?

KUNDERA

That is true, and he was well aware of his own courage. But there is also a risk: his essay can be read and understood as the ideological key to the novel, as its "Truth," and that could transform the rest of the novel into a mere illustration of a thought. Then the novel's equilibrium is upset; the truth of the essay becomes too heavy and the novel's subtle architecture is in danger of collapsing. A novel that had no intention of expounding a philosophical thesis (Broch loathed that type of novel!) may wind up being read in exactly that way. How does one incorporate an essay into the novel? It is important to have one basic fact in mind: the very essence of reflection changes the minute it is included in the body of a novel. Outside of the novel, one is in the realm of assertions: everyone—philosopher, politician, concierge—is sure of what he says. The novel, however, is a territory where one does not make assertions; it is a territory of play and of hypotheses. Reflection within the novel is hypothetical by its very essence.

INTERVIEWER

But why would a novelist want to deprive himself of the right to express his philosophy overtly and assertively in his novel?

KUNDERA

Because he has none! People often talk about Chekhov's philosophy, or Kafka's, or Musil's. But just try to find a coherent philosophy in their writings! Even when they express their ideas in their notebooks, the ideas amount to intellectual exercises, playing with paradoxes, or improvisations rather than to assertions of a philosophy. And philosophers who write novels are nothing but pseudonovelists who use the form of the novel in order to illustrate their ideas. Neither

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Voltaire nor Camus ever discovered "that which the novel alone can discover." I know of only one exception, and that is the Diderot of *Jacques le Fataliste.* What a miracle! Having crossed over the boundary of the novel, the serious philosopher becomes a playful thinker. There is not one serious sentence in the novel—everything in it is play. That's why this novel is outrageously underrated in France. Indeed, *Jacques le Fataliste* contains everything that France has lost and refuses to recover. In France, ideas are preferred to works. *Jacques le Fataliste* cannot be translated into the language of ideas, and therefore it cannot be understood in the homeland of ideas.

INTERVIEWER

In *The Joke*, it is Jaroslav who develops a musicological theory. The hypothetical character of his thinking is thus apparent. But the musicological meditations in *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting* are the author's, your own. How am I then to understand whether they are hypothetical or assertive?

KUNDERA

It all depends on the tone. From the very first words, my intention is to give these reflections a playful, ironic, provocative, experimental, or questioning tone. All of part six of *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* ("The Grand March") is an essay on kitsch which expounds one main thesis: kitsch is the absolute denial of the existence of shit. This meditation on kitsch is of vital importance to me. It is based on a great deal of thought, experience, study, and even passion. Yet the tone is never serious; it is provocative. This essay is unthinkable outside of the novel, it is a purely novelistic meditation.

INTERVIEWER

The polyphony of your novels also includes another element, dream-narrative. It takes up the entire second part of *Life Is Elsewhere*, it is the basis of the sixth part of *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting,* and it runs through *The Un-*

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bearable Lightness of Being by way of Tereza's dreams.

KUNDERA

These passages are also the easiest ones to misunderstand, because people want to find some symbolic message in them. There is nothing to decipher in Tereza's dreams. They are poems about death. Their meaning lies in their beauty, which hypnotizes Tereza. By the way, do you realize that people don't know how to read Kafka simply because they want to decipher him? Instead of letting themselves be carried away by his unequalled imagination, they look for allegories—and come up with nothing but clichés: life is absurd (or it is not absurd), God is beyond reach (or within reach), etc. You can understand nothing about art, particularly modern art, if you do not understand that imagination is a value in itself. Novalis knew that when he praised dreams. They "protect us against life's monotony," he said, they "liberate us from seriousness by the delight of their games." He was the first to understand the role that dreams and a dream-like imagination could play in the novel. He planned to write the second volume of his *Heinrich von Ofterdingen* as a narrative in which dream and reality would be so intertwined that one would no longer be able to tell them apart. Unfortunately, all that remains of that second volume are the notes in which Novalis described his esthetic intention. One hundred years later, his ambition was fulfilled by Kafka. Kafka's novels are a fusion of dream and reality; that is, they are neither dream nor reality. More than anything, Kafka brought about an esthetic revolution. An esthetic miracle. Of course, no one can repeat what he did. But I share with him, and with Novalis, the desire to bring dreams, and the imagination of dreams, into the novel. My way of doing so is by polyphonic confrontation rather than by a fusion of dream and reality. Dream-narrative is one of the elements of counterpoint.

INTERVIEWER

There is nothing polyphonic about the last part of *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*, and yet that is probably the

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most interesting part of the book. It is made up of fourteen chapters that recount erotic situations in the life of one man—Jan.

KUNDERA

Another musical term: this narrative is a "theme with variations." The theme is the border beyond which things lose their meaning. Our life unfolds in the immediate vicinity of that border, and we risk crossing it at any moment. The fourteen chapters are fourteen variations of the same situation—eroticism at the border between meaning and meaninglessness.

INTERVIEWER

You have described *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting* as a "novel in the form of variations." But is it still a novel?

KUNDERA

There is no unity of action, which is why it does not look like a novel. People can't *imagine* a novel without that unity. Even the experiments of the *nouveau roman* were based on unity of action (or of non-action). Sterne and Diderot had amused themselves by making the unity extremely fragile. The journey of Jacques and his master takes up the lesser part of *Jacques le Fataliste*; it's nothing more than a comic pretext in which to fit anecdotes, stories, thoughts. Nevertheless, this pretext, this "frame," is necessary to make the novel feel like a novel. In *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting* there is no longer any such pretext. It's the unity of the themes and their variations that give coherence to the whole. Is it a novel? Yes. A novel is a meditation on existence, seen through imaginary characters. The form is unlimited freedom. Throughout its history, the novel has never known how to take advantage of its endless possibilities. It missed its chance.

INTERVIEWER

But except for *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*, your novels are also based on unity of action, although it is indeed

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of a much looser variety in *The Unbearable Lightness of Being.*

KUNDERA

Yes, but other more important sorts of unity complete them: the unity of the same metaphysical questions, of the same motifs and then variations (the motif of paternity in *The Farewell Party*, for instance). But I would like to stress above all that the novel is primarily built on a number of fundamental words, like Schoenberg's series of notes. In *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*, the series is the following: forgetting, laughter, angels, "litost," the border. In the course of the novel these five key words are analyzed, studied, defined, redefined and thus transformed into categories of existence. It is built on these few categories in the same way as a house is built on its beams. The beams of *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* are: weight, lightness, the soul, the body, the Grand March, shit, kitsch, compassion, vertigo, strength, and weakness. Because of their categorical character, these words cannot be replaced by synonyms. This always has to be explained over and over again to translators, who—in their concern for "good style"—seek to avoid repetition.

INTERVIEWER

Regarding the architectural clarity, I was struck by the fact that all of your novels, except for one, are divided into seven parts.

KUNDERA

When I had finished my first novel, *The Joke*, there was no reason to be surprised that it had seven parts. Then I wrote *Life Is Elsewhere.* The novel was almost finished and it had six parts. I didn't feel satisfied. Suddenly I had the idea of including a story that takes place three years after the hero's death—in other words, outside the time frame of the novel. This now became the sixth part of seven, entitled "The Middle-Aged Man." Immediately, the novel's architecture had become perfect. Later on, I realized that this sixth part was

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oddly analogous to the sixth part of *The Joke* ("Kostka"), which also introduces an outside character, and also opens a secret window in the novel's wall. *Laughable Loves* started out as ten short stories. Putting together the final version, I eliminated three of them. The collection had become very coherent, foreshadowing the composition of *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*. One character, Doctor Havel, ties the fourth and sixth stories together. In *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*, the fourth and sixth parts are also linked by the same person: Tamina. When I wrote *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, I was determined to break the spell of the number of seven. I had long since decided on a six-part outline. But the first part always struck me as shapeless. Finally, I understood that it was really made up of two parts. Like Siamese twins, they had to be separated by delicate surgery. The only reason I mention all this is to show that I am not indulging in some superstitious affectation about magic numbers, nor making a rational calculation. Rather, I am driven by a deep, unconscious, incomprehensible need, a formal archetype from which I cannot escape. All of my novels are variants of an architecture based on the number seven.

INTERVIEWER

The use of seven neatly divided parts is certainly linked to your goal of synthesizing the most heterogeneous elements into a unified whole. Each part of your novel is always a world of its own, and is distinct from the others because of its special form. But if the novel is divided into numbered parts, why must the parts themselves also be divided into numbered chapters?

KUNDERA

The chapters themselves must also create a little world of their own; they must be relatively independent. That is why I keep pestering my publishers to make sure that the numbers are clearly visible and that the chapters are well separated. The chapters are like the measures of a musical score! There

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are parts where the measures (chapters) are long, others where they are short, still others where they are of irregular length. Each part could have a musical tempo indication: *moderato*, *presto*, *andante*, etc. Part six of *Life Is Elsewhere* is *andante*: in a calm, melancholy manner, it tells of the brief encounter between a middle-aged man and a young girl who has just been released from prison. The last part is *prestissimo*: it is written in very short chapters, and jumps from the dying Jaromil to Rimbaud, Lermontov and Pushkin. I first thought of *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* in a musical way. I knew that the last part had to be *pianissimo* and *lento*: it focuses on a rather short, uneventful period, in a single location, and the tone is quiet. I also knew that this part had to be preceded by a *prestissimo*: that is the part entitled "The Grand March."

INTERVIEWER

There is an exception to the rule of the number seven. There are only five parts to *The Farewell Party*.

KUNDERA

The Farewell Party is based on another formal archetype: it is absolutely homogeneous, deals with one subject, is told in one tempo; it is very theatrical, stylized, and derives its form from the farce. In *Laughable Loves*, the story entitled "The Symposium" is built exactly the same way—a farce in five acts.

INTERVIEWER

What do you mean by farce?

KUNDERA

I mean the emphasis on plot and on all its trappings of unexpected and incredible coincidences. Nothing has become as suspect, ridiculous, old-fashioned, trite, and tasteless in a novel as plot and its farcical exaggerations. From Flaubert on, novelists have tried to do away with the artifices of plot. And so the novel has become duller than the dullest of lives. Yet there is another way to get around the suspect and worn-out

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aspect of the plot, and that is to free it from the requirement of likelihood. You tell an unlikely story that *chooses* to be unlikely! That's exactly how Kafka conceived *Amerika.* The way Karl meets his uncle in the first chapter is through a series of the most unlikely coincidences. Kafka entered into his first "sur-real" universe, into his first "fusion of dream and reality," with a parody of the plot—through the door of farce.

INTERVIEWER

But why did you choose the farce form for a novel that is not at all meant to be an entertainment?

KUNDERA

But it *is* an entertainment! I don't understand the contempt that the French have for entertainment, why they are so ashamed of the word "*divertissement.*" They run less risk of being entertaining than of being boring. And they also run the risk of falling for kitsch, that sweetish, lying embellishment of things, the rose-colored light that bathes even such modernist works as Eluard's poetry or Ettore Scola's recent film *Le Bal*, whose subtitle could be: "French history as kitsch." Yes, kitsch, not entertainment, is the *real* esthetic disease! The great European novel started out as entertainment, and every true novelist is nostalgic for it. In fact, the themes of those great entertainments are terribly serious—think of Cervantes! In *The Farewell Party*, the question is, does man deserve to live on this earth? Shouldn't one "free the planet from man's clutches"? My lifetime ambition has been to unite the utmost seriousness of question with the utmost lightness of form. Nor is this purely an artistic ambition. The combination of a frivolous form and a serious subject immediately unmasks the truth about our dramas (those that occur in our beds as well as those that we play out on the great stage of History) and their awful insignificance. We experience the unbearable lightness of being.

INTERVIEWER

So you could just as well have used the title of your latest

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novel for *The Farewell Party*?

KUNDERA

Every one of my novels could be entitled *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* or *The Joke* or *Laughable Loves*; the titles are interchangeable, they reflect the small number of themes that obsess me, define me, and, unfortunately, restrict me. Beyond these themes, I have nothing else to say or to write.

INTERVIEWER

There are, then, two formal archetypes of composition in your novels: (1) polyphony, which unites heterogeneous elements into an architecture based on the number seven; (2) farce, which is homogeneous, theatrical, and skirts the unlikely. Could there be a Kundera outside of these two archetypes?

KUNDERA

I always dream of some great unexpected infidelity. But I have not yet been able to escape my bigamous state.

—Christian Salmon

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A Translation Supplement: Five Poets

Ten Poems by Ingeborg Bachmann

My Bird

Whatever comes to pass: the devastated world
sinks back into twilight,
the forest offers it a sleeping potion,
and from the tower the watchman's forsaken,
peaceful and constant the eyes of the owl stare down.

Whatever comes to pass: you know your time,
my bird, you put on your veil
and fly through the mist to me.

We peer into the haze where the rabble houses.
You follow my nod and storm out
in a whirl of feathers and fur—

My ice-gray shoulder companion, my weapon,
adorned with that feather, my only weapon!
My only finery: your veil and your feather.

And even when my skin burns
in the needle dance beneath the tree,
and the hip-high shrubs
tempt me with their spicy leaves,
when my curls dart like snake tongues,
sway and long for moisture,
the dust of distant stars still falls
right on my hair.

When I, in a helmet of smoke,
come back to my senses,

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my bird, my nighttime ally,
when I'm ablaze in the night
the dark grove crackles
and I hammer the sparks from my limbs.

And when I stay ablaze as I am,
loved by the flame
until the resin streams out of the trunks,
drips over the wounds and
spins the earth warm into thread
(and though you rob my heart at night,
my bird of belief, my bird of faith!)
the watchtower moves into brightness
where you, tranquil now,
alight in magnificent peace—
whatever comes to pass.

The Heavy Freight

The heavy freight of summer is on board,
waiting in the harbor the sun ship lies
when at your back the seagull swoops and cries.
The heavy freight of summer is on board.

Waiting in the harbor the sun ship lies,
and along the lips of figureheads
the cunning smile of lemurs slyly threads.
Waiting in the harbor the sun ship lies.

When at your back the seagull swoops and cries
the order to sink comes eastward into sight.
Yet open-eyed you will drown in light
when at your back the seagull swoops and cries.

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Shadow Roses Shadow

Beneath a foreign sky
shadow roses
shadow
on a foreign earth
between roses and shadows
in a foreign water
my shadow

We have risen and the cloisters are empty,

We have risen and the cloisters are empty,
since we endure, an order that neither saves nor teaches.
Action is not the pilot's concern. They have their eyes
fixed on defense posts, and spread out on their knees
a map of the world to which nothing can be added.

Who is living down below? Who is crying . . .
Who has lost his housekey?
Who cannot find his bed, who is sleeping
on doorsteps? Who, when morning comes,
dares to interpret the silver trail: look, above me . . .
When water starts turning the mill wheel again,
who dares to remember the night?

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To the Sun

Fairer than the venerable moon and her noble light,
Fairer than the stars, the famous orders of the night,
Much fairer than the fiery burst of a comet,
And called to more beauty than any heavenly body
Since your life and my life depend on it daily, is the sun.

Fair sun that rises, remembers his chores
and finishes them, fairest in summer when a day
steams off the coasts, and effortlessly mirrored the sails
glide over your eye, till you grow tired and cut short the last.

Without the sun even art puts back on its veil,
You no longer appear to me, and the sea and the sand,
whipped by shadows, take refuge under my eyelid.

Fair light that keeps us warm, sustains and cares for us wonderfully,
Letting me see again and see you again!

Nothing fairer under the sun than to be under the sun . . .

Nothing fairer than to see the rod in water and the bird above,
pondering his flight, and down below the fish in their school.

Colored, shaped, come into the world with a mission of light,
And to see the radius, the square of a field, the geometry of my land
And the dress you put on. And your dress, bell-shaped and blue.

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Fair blue, in which peacocks stroll and bow,
Blue of distant skies, zones of happiness with weather for all my moods,
Blue chance on the horizon! And my zealous eyes
Open wide and blink and burn themselves sore.

Fair sun, which even the dust admires infinitely,
Hence not for the moon or the stars and not
Because the night shows off her comets and tries to fool me,
But for your sake and soon endlessly and as if nothing else mattered
I shall lament the unavoidable loss of my eyes.

Go, My Thought

Go, my thought, as long as a word clear enough for flight
is your wing, lifts you and goes to that place
where the light metals sway,
where the air is sharp
in a new understanding,
where weapons speak
of a single kind.
Defend us there!

The scale bore a piece of driftwood high and sinks.
Fever pulled you to its breast, lets you fall.
Faith has moved only a mountain.

Let stand, what stands, go, my thought!

Filled by nothing other than our suffering.
Conform to us exactly!

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Exile

I am a dead man who wanders
nowhere announced
unknown in the realm of the prefect
superfluous in the golden cities
and the greening land

done away with long ago
bequeathed with nothing

Only with wind with time with sound

I who cannot live among men

I with the German language
this cloud about me
that I keep as a house
push through all languages

O how this tongue grows dim
the dark ones the rain notes
only the few fall

Into brighter places it bears the dead man high

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Autumn Maneuver

I don't say: that was before. Our pockets stuffed
with worthless summer money, we lie once more
on the chaff of scorn, in the autumn maneuver of time.
And flight to the south,
where the birds go, doesn't help us. In the evening
fishing trawlers and gondolas glide past, and sometimes
a splinter of dream-filled marble hits me
where I'm vulnerable, with beauty, in the eye.

In the newspapers I read much about the cold
and its consequences, about fools and the dead,
about the banished, the murderers and myriads
of ice-floes, but little that comforts me.
Should it be otherwise? At noon a beggar comes
And I slam the door in his face; for there is peace
and you can spare yourself an unpleasant sight, though not
the joyless dying of leaves when it rains.

Let us take a journey! Let us see sunsets under cypresses
or else under palm trees, or in orange groves,
at reduced prices, sunsets
that have no equal! Let us forget
our unanswered letters to the past!
Time does wonders. But should it come unjustly,
with the throb of guilt: we aren't at home.
In the cellar of my heart, sleepless, I find myself once more
on the chaff of scorn, in the autumn maneuver of time.

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Night Portrait of Rome

And should the swing abduct the seven hills
into the sky, it also falls back,
heavy with our embraces,
into dark water,

dives in the river mire until fish
gather in our lap.
When it's our turn
we push off.

The hills are sinking;
we climb and share
each fish with the night.

No one jumps off.
For we know only love
or the hand of a friend
can lift us high.

In the Storm of Roses

Wherever we turn in the storm of roses,
thorns illuminate the night. And the thunder
of a thousand leaves, once so quiet on the bushes,
is right at our heels.

translated from the German by Mark Anderson

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The Clouds

Doubly silent the afternoon
By virtue of empty summer, and of a flame
Overflowing, is it from this vase
Or from somewhere higher in the sky?

So we've slept: I don't know how many
Summers in the light; and I don't know
In what spaces our eyes are opening.
I listen, nothing vibrates, nothing ends.

Desire shaping the image, lost in thought,
Barely turns, on its simple axis, the clay
Of a dreamt awakening, soaked with darkness.

Yet the sun buzzes at the windowpane
And, its soul wrapped in its red elytra,
Drops, but peacefully, toward the land of the dead.

* * *

Above me along, when I drew the sign
Of hope in a time of war, a cloud
Prowled blackly and in great flashes
The wind scattered the useless phrase.

Above the two of us, who have willed
The knot and the loosing, an energy
Gathered between two high, looming flanks
and there was, finally,
Something like a shuddering in the light.

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Other countries, mountains lit by the sky,
Lakes beyond them, unapproached, new
Shores,—appeasement of the god-progenitors,
The lightning-flash will have been its own cause

And above the child at her play
The ring of these clouds, the bright fire
That seems to linger this evening, like a proof.

* * *

Clouds, yes,
One with the others, ships arriving
In musical intervals. It seems to me, at times,
That necessity is metamorphosed
As at the end of the *Winter's Tale*
When they all recognize each other, when you see
From level to level in the light
That those who have been cast by pride and doubt
From place to place in their idle talk
Find and know themselves. Their silence in that moment
Speaks; and their few words are silence
Whether from joy or sorrow who can say
"But in the extremity of the one it must needs be."
They looked, the witness also said,
Grown thoughtful, on his way
Away, "as they had heard of a world
Ransomed, or one destroyed."

Clouds,
And two of them crimson, a father, a daughter,
And, closer, a third, the statue of a woman,
Mother of beauty, mother of meaning,
Who you see, though she has been motionless
A long time, her voice stifled
From age to age, denied, animated
Only by the magic of sculpture,
Is coming to life, and will speak. Lightning

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Her eyes opening in the abyss of clear sandstone,
But lightning that smiles as if, condemned
To follow the sterile flow of a dream
But finding gold in the virgin sand,
She had taken thought and consented.
Then the man approaches, his harrowed
Face softening at so much joy.
He climbs the steps of the fleeting hour
In bursts, for the sky changes, night is coming,
And wavers where she awaits him, starry night
Opening wide, music. He straightens up,
He turns toward the universe. Its features glitter
With the phosphorescence of the absolute,
And day recovers for them and for us,
Like a vein filling with blood again—a summit
Of trees crevassed by lightning, rivers,
Castles peaceful on the far shore. Yes,
An earth upheld on its columns of cloud.

And what matter if the man, under the turning sky,
Wavers a second time, says to the woman
Who is already half swept-away, a black cloud,
Some words no one hears and then turns,
Draws back from her as she begins to vanish,
And leans to her
And hides his weeping face in her pure hands.

Since from the West, which is still light,
A flat-bottomed ship, its prow a figure
Of fire, of smoke, comes into view,
A reopened book, a red cloud, at the crest
Of the swelling wave. It approaches,
Tacks about slowly, you cannot see
Its decks, its masts, cannot hear the shouts
Of its crew, cannot guess
The chimeras, the hopes of the men
Crowded at the bow, wide-eyed,
Nor what new horizon they glimpse,

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What shore perhaps, nor do you know
What burning city they are fleeing from,
What unattainable Troy; but you feel
All of summer's heat, our anguish, beating
In that bare arm. . . . Have faith, redeemed earth,
A sense may grow in your words, as transparency
Grows in the grapes of aging summer.
When you speak or sing, child,
Immediately I dream that the whole earthly arbor
Is shining; and that this weight
Of stars huddled in the cold, of stones
Dense as unrevealed tongues, of peaks
Still wrapped in our night, of cries of despair
And cries of joy, of lives parted
In the enigma, of mistakes, breakdowns, solitudes,
But of dawns, too, of premonitions,
Of waters unraveling in the distance, of reunions,
Of children playing brightly on passing bows,
Of fires in the open houses, of calls
At evening, from door to door in the stillness,
Yes, that this truth, this place, this good,
This once green cluster is ripening now.

It is all so coherent, isn't it, so ready
Though, of course, still sealed? The morning sun
And the evening sun, the illuminated, two
Blind oxen, indeed pull the plow
Of universal, unattained gold,
And, true, a chain of stars clinks on their foreheads,
Indifferent stars: yet they keep on
As water evaporates, as a salt settles out
And is it not you there, mother with bright eyes,
Earth, who drive them,
Your red dress torn, or rather parted slightly
Under the arch of the first-born star.

But always and distinctly I also see
The black stain in the image, I hear

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The cry that pierces the music, and know
In myself the poverty of meaning. No,
Our place, in its darkness, can have no pretense
To transfigurations. I speak of hope,
Its joy, even its fire, like an immense cluster
Of grapes, when the lightning each night strikes
The window, when things assemble in the flash
As in the place of origin, and the paths would shine
In the gardens of lightning, and beauty turn
Her wandering step there. . . . I speak of the dream,
But only so that wounded words may rest.

And I can even speak, and am sometimes tempted
To speak to you, feverish signs,
Crying out, of great painted halls,
Shaded inner courtyards, summer's fullness
On the cool flagstones, the murmur
As of absent water, the breast
That is like water, one, infinite,
Swollen with red clay. To give you
A ring of palm-tree skies, but also
This heavy ring at the heel, that a warm
And indifferent hand slips over the arch
Of a lean foot, even though
The half-opened mouth seeks only
The memory of another. "Look at me,"
The voice that is nothing would say through mine,
"I lie, infinitely, yet I please you,
I am not, yet I shut my eyes,
If you wish I will bend my dark neck,
I will sing, if you wish, weary spirit,
Or feign sleep. . . ." At dusk
The wasp is crowned with light, she reigns
Absolute over the cluster of grapes
In her moment of groping ascension.
No, we're not cured of the garden, any more
Than the dream's outpouring, swollen with black
Water, ceases when we open our eyes.

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In the half-light of the glittering
Rush from below, we shall still load
Our flat-bottomed boat with fruit, with flowers
Like a red fire, whose smoke
Will scatter its acrid images along
The hours and shores. And what childish hopes
Under the branches! What a journey
Among consenting words! Though night, even there,
Brushes us with an unnoticed wing
And dips its beak, even there, in the quick water.

* * *

"My wish was to be but an image, and to make him
An image, too, so that time's fire,
Though it take bodies, cries, even dreams, would leave
Untouched the form in which we knew ourselves,

So I made myself his store of pure water,
I unbounded his eyes that were bent on me,
My mouth loved his mouth's furtive trustings,
My joy was to wait and give myself to him.

—He sleeps. I am the curtain in the doorway
That was soaked with water to change the sky,
I hem the afternoon in ultramarine,
I am the play of a few shadows on his body.

He grows older. Even in us the hour has filled out
And rolls its noise of coming night among the stones.
At times he lets his arm trail in this colder water,
Perhaps in dream, forgetting about me. . . ."

* * *

"Though you come for this closed book,
I will not allow you to open it.
Though you come to break the seal,

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Burning, pitted with night, bent, leaves
Under the prowling threat of a storm,
I will not let you touch the wax.
Though you come 'only in order to' glimpse,
As in a dream, how speech can be
Metamorphosed in the dawn of meaning
(And I know that a ploughshare has worked
A long time in that hope and, fallen back
Into the earthly phrase, shines there
Devastated at the edge of my light), listen,
I am silent in your dreaming voice. . . .
Though you come to lay waste the writing
(All writing, all hope), in order to recover
The unclouded surface that reflects the star,
To drink of the passing water and to bathe
Under the vault where fruit not meaning ripens,
I have not allowed you to forget the book."

* * *

O dreams, fine children
In the light
Of torn dresses,
Of painted shoulders.

"Since life has no meaning,"
Breathes the voice,
"It's enough if we paint
Our bodies with red clouds.

See, I brighten this breast
With a little clay
And set joy, which is nothingness,
Free of sin."

* * *

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They walk, bare-footed
In their absence
And come to the banks
Of the river earth.

They ask, they give,
Their eyes closed,
Their heels reddened
With the clay of images.

Nothing will have come before,
Nothing ends, they share
The water, they lie down,
The bare flank reflects the star.

They pass, taking part
In the sparkling water,
In you, skipped stone,
In worlds widening away.

* * *

And they're joined on the way
By Flora, the pure one,
Who throws her poppies
To whoever asks.

And pastoral beauty,
Naked, to open
To the damp beasts, in morning's chill,
The fold of the simple.

—But also the grey
Beauty of smoke
That writhes and unravels
At the slightest breath

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You bend down. . . . Myrtle, then weeping,
My dear, that is only summer trembling
As a window-blind when the wind assaults it
Trembles on the torn hope of its hinge.
But how bright the day is! Our revolt
Is soaked up by the porosity of the light,
And the sky's wing darkening over, its cry,
The wind picking up again, all of this speaks
Of life at last ready for itself, not of death.
You see, trusting will have been enough,
The child has taken aged time by the hand,
And the water, and the fruit among the leaves,
He leads them silently into the mystery,
And for us who watch from afar, may it be
All simple to meet his unblinking glance.

* * *

Desire became Love on its nocturnal ways
Through the grief of the ages; and through beauty
Understood, through limits accepted, through memory
Love, time, has brought the child, who is the sign.

And in us and of us, who remain
So dark to each other, which is the one sin
But inescapable, our human speech
As yet unfinished, like being itself,

May its joy take form: to hold
The water in its fleeting cup; to reflect
The fire, which is nothingness; to offer
At least the idea of meaning—to the light.

* * *

Clouds,
And one, the most distant, yes,
Forever red, water and fire

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In the earthen vessel, swirls
Of smoke around the glowing center
Where a flame will leap up. . . . But here
The ground, like the sky,
Is strewn to infinity with stones
Some of which, red,
Bear marks that we dream are signs.

And we pick them from the moss, the brambles,
We take them and hold them up. Look!
There is a line here, some kind of script,
Here a cry trembled on the hinge of meaning,
Here. . . . But no, it says nothing, the mark
Swerves off, this too
At the peak of the glowing center, in the mind,
Where repetition, symmetry
Would have kept the memory of a writing hand.

Silence
Like a fallen bridge above us
In the evening.

And yet, my dear,
We gather so many
And still more of these stones, when night
Staining the red cloth, choking our voices,
Already hides them from our anxious hands.

And clouds that we are, their fire guides us
When we come back, weighted down,
To the house, "yonder." When we pass
Vacant
In the flaming window of this country
That resembles language: brightly lit
In the distance, stony here. When we go
Further still, wearing, breaking down,
The child running ahead of us in his joy
To his unknown life,

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And the mad girl who speaks
With many mouths,
And bending down, shakes
Her disheveled hair. . . .

* * *

"You shall not touch me
Summer or winter,
But when the moon waxes
Nor when it wanes.

Neither with longing hands
Nor in image,
Neither with a loving mouth
Nor with a torn.

But should you sleep
I will come to meet
Your lips again,

Should you turn over
Sighing
As if to bend down, my voyager,
To a spring,

I will be there,
Your lips will brush my closed eyelids."

* * *

Here is the task
I cannot finish. Here, the words
I will not speak.

Here, the black
Pool, in the storm-cloud.

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Here, the blind spot
In the glance of the eye.

* * *

But, see,
There, all the same, our windows
Are still lit by the evening sun
And our windowpanes are like water, clouded
But also transmuted, coagulated
By the meditative arm of the light.
The enigma, the dreamt sun, the red boat
Passes, limping its death. But this calm
Country is its wake, where the house
Reveals itself as the star, that rises
For peace above the grasses, in the breathing,
Even at last, of the gods of the empty garden.
Go nearer. Up close the windows lose their light,
But the gold, withdrawing to its far shore,
Has left the vine, nothingness, to flower
In the virgin sand. Oh, lean forward, rest
Your forehead on the glass! This is the good,
Each place where birth rises in the ceaseless flow,
See truth's vine growing, you who consent,
See its branches shining in the dim hall.

You bend down, you pick
A little of the divinity of a dry herb
And in the profusion of its crushed odor
This waiting which is life, this cry of hunger, ends.
Of lips that ask for other lips,
Of water that seeks a slope among the stones,
Of the lamb's leaping, which is pure joy,
Of the child playing ever on the threshold,
You fulfill the vow since you accept
The earth which exceeds desire.

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Simple—no, clear,

Peaceful,
Motionless sometimes at the crossroads,
Between the columns of fire of the summer that is ending,
In the odor of star and ash.

* * *

"All of that," yes,
Our enticements, our joys,
Our endless longings,
No, our consents, our certainties,

All of that is summer,
The incoherent
That assaults our eyes
With its sudden water.

And outside it is night,
No, it is day,
Glairy, proclaiming
A birth.

* * *

Summer:
This screech owl
Nailed to the threshold
By the star's peaceful iron.

translated from the French by Richard Pevear

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Brooding

I

Probably
evening is falling. Not because of the years,
which are numerous, but because the play
bored the actors more than the audience.
I haven't ventured into the forest
or consulted Saint Bonaventure like C.
May God preserve her.
It doesn't take long to learn that the years
are the twinkling of an eye and the past
is already the future. And the trouble is
the incomprehensible is the only reason that sustains us.
If it becomes clear the First Causes
already contained the explosion of the ridiculous
then we'll have to look elsewhere though without success
since the future already passed some time ago.

II

It seems assured that life was born
from a raging incompatibility
of vapors and gases and this comforts us
because the human brain comes out unscathed.
The infinite, the sublime and other heights,
even if they're our burden don't burden us
with a well-founded pride. Non possumus,
but we come off blameless.
The blame comes later and it's incontestable.
It's the sin of pride that ought to be
pardoned, if a judge
were available, which is denied on several sides.
And what if it were otherwise?

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Clizia in '34

Still lounging
on the chaise longue
of the veranda
facing the garden
a book in hand, perhaps already then
the lives of half-unheard-of saints
and baroque poets of scant reputation
this wasn't love
then as now it was always
veneration.

Predictions

We escaped into the garden (hanging if I'm correct)
to hide from the erotic
chitchat of a new boarder
and you spoke about poets' women
created to pad unreadable odes.
So it will be with me, you added under your breath.
I was still as stone. Then I said, you forget
the bullet doesn't know who's firing it
and doesn't know its target.
                But we're not
in a shooting gallery, said C. And besides
I don't believe you have firearms in your luggage.

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Inside/Outside

When reality comes undone
(if ever there was one) and some of its parts
encrust themselves on us
then the odor of ether not from a clinic
alerts us that the chain has been broken
and the memory is a piece of eternity
wandering on its own
maybe waiting to reform itself in us.
So I see you
turning away from the dock
on the ocean liner that will carry you
to New England
or we're together on the veranda
of "Annalena"
defleaing the rhymes of the reverend
itchy John Donne
having dismissed the dizzying voids
of Meister Eckhardt and company.
But now the telephone rings
and a voice I can barely recognize says hello.
I wanted to call, it adds, after thirty years.
My name is Giovanna, I was Clizia's friend
and I sailed with her. I have nothing to add
not even arrivederci, which would be ridiculous
for us both.

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In '38

We were with a few friends
after the Palio
and stopped to take
the usual photos.
I still have one, a dirty yellow
practically in shreds
but there it is, your incredible face,
miraculous.
This was in '38.
Later they said
you tacked to the "left"
but hearing it didn't surprise me
for I knew that Existence
has no opinions or many
according to its whim
and he who can't follow them
is followed by them.
This was in '38.

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Foursome

In a yellowed snapshot
of forty years ago
fished out of the bottom of a drawer
your face, severe in its sweetness
and your servant beside you; and Sbarbaro behind—
bryologist and poet—and Elena Vivante
the mistress of us all: come here to see
four nags in a shell-shaped piazza
whipped till they bled
in front of a frenzied crowd.
And the date? I said forty years, it may be zero.
I don't believe in time, the big bang, or anything
that measures events in a before and after.
I suppose someone, something, deserves
the epithet of being. On that day it was you.
But for how long, but how? And here again
the execrable idea of time resurfaces.

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"Since Life is Fleeing . . ."

Since life is fleeing
and he who tries to set it in reverse
gets caught in the primordial web again,
where can we hide, if we try to survive
with rudiments or worse,
the objects that seemed
an undying part of ourselves?
Once there was a little bookcase
that traveled with Clizia, a receptacle
for Holy Fathers and questionable poets;
may it have the power to float
on the crest of the waves
when the flood has drowned everything.
If nothing of me, at least some bit of you
ought to vanquish oblivion.

And as for me? The hope is that the visible
will dissolve, along with the time that gave it
the dubious proof that this voice Exists
(a capital E, the only letter in the alphabet
that makes existence possible
or at least a possible hypothesis).
Then (you often wore
dark glasses but you put them aside
for good with the fleas of John Donne)
prepare for the big dive.
We were happy for a day, an hour, an instant,
and can this be destroyed?
Some say everything begins again
just like a copy but I don't believe it
not even as a wish. Did you
believe it too? There's no sibyl at Cumae
who knows. And if there were,
no one would be foolish enough to listen.

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Credo

1944

Maybe it was through some loophole in the law
of retribution
that a sneeze in Via Varchi, 6, in Florence
got as far as Bard College, N.Y.
Was it Love? Not the love whose terrifying shock
peopled the heavens with stars and planets.
No such power in the god with beard and hair
dethroned by the membership of the Rotary Club,
though he deserves to survive their cabals.
I believe it's true, the miracle that between life and death
a third state exists that found us among its own.
May a god (but a god with a beard) protect you,
my divine one. And the rest, the little lies
we're stuffed with, are less
than nothing.

translated from the Italian by Jonathan Galassi

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Dino Campana

The Night

I. The Night

I remember an old city, red walls and battlements, on the immense plain burnt out from the August heat, with the far-away spongy cold comfort of green hills in the background. Enormous emptiness of bridge-arches over the stagnant river dried to thin leaden puddles: a black moulding of mosquitoes shifting and silent along the banks: among the dazzle and glare of a distant cane-brake the far-off naked figures of teen-age boys and the Hasidic beard of an old man: and suddenly out of the midst of the dead water the mosquitoes came and a song, primordial dirge from the voiceless swamp monotonous and irritating: and time ground down and held still.

I raised my eyes unconsciously to the barbarous tower which dominated the long avenue of plane trees. Above a silence wound to intensity it began to drag from the dead its distant savage mythology: at the same time, through other distant hallucinations, other vague, violent apprehensions, another myth—also mysterious and wild—kept coming back to me. Down below the old women, the strollers, had brought their long gowns softly toward the splendor of the gate: the countryside was beginning to numb up and go sleepy in its network of canals; young girls with weightless hair, and profiles cut from medallions, disappeared now and then in little carts around green bends in the road. The sweet silver toll of a bell from far away: Evening: in the empty chapel, in the shadows of the modest nave, I held Her, the rose-pale flesh and the burning fugitive eyes: years and years and years melted together in the triumphal sweet taste of the memory.

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The person I once had been found himself unconsciously heading toward the barbarous tower, legendary keeper of adolescent dreams. In the silence of ancient lanes and half-streets he climbed up alongside the church and the convent walls: you couldn't even hear the noise of his footsteps. A deserted little piazza, broken hovels like old bruises, dead windows: to one side in an enormous wash of light, the tower, eight-pointed red impenetrably slick and unadorned; a dried-up 16th-century fountain kept silent, its stone shattered in the middle of its own Latin commentary. A deserted cobblestone road opened up toward the city.

He was startled by a door that had been thrown open. Old men, crooked and silent bony forms, straddled and crawled over each other with their piercing elbows, terrible in the wide light. Then they stopped with anxious and servile bows in front of the whiskery face of a monk who was leaning out from the emptiness of a doorway, and then slinked away muttering, raising themselves up little by little, dragging their long shadows after them one by one across the red and flaking walls, each one just like a shadow. A woman with a swinging walk and a foolish laugh joined them, finishing off the cortege.

They stretched their shadows out along the red plaster-flaked walls: he followed, an automaton. He said one word to the woman and it fell into the noon silence: an old man turned to stare at him with an absurd vacant and luminous look. And the woman kept on smiling with a soft sweet smile in the aridity of noon, doltish and alone in the catastrophic light.

I never knew how I saw my own shadow coasting along the torpid canals, my ghost that laughed back at me from the depths. It went with me along the strong-smelling streets where women sang in the hot weather. At the edge of the countryside a door cut in the stone, guarded by a young woman in a red dress, pale and fat, caught its eye: I entered. An old and opulent courtesan was sitting inside, profile like

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a ram's, with black hair twisted loosely about her sculptural head wildly decorated by a rheumy eye like a black gemstone with bizarre facets, agitated by childish graces that kept resurfacing like false hopes being pulled from a deck of cards in long sanctimonious strange theories of languishing queens a king infantrymen weapons and knights. I spoke to her and a voice from the convent, deep and melodramatic answered me along with a wrinkled and gracious smile. Stretched out in the shadows the maidservant half nude slept with her mouth half open, her throat rattling in a heavy sleep, her beautiful body supple and amber. I sat down slowly.

The long speculations about her loves unraveled monotonously in my ears. Old family portraits were scattered sanctimoniously over the table. The lithe figure with amber skin stretched out on a bed and listened curiously, leaning on her elbow like a sphinx: outside the green green orchard between reddened walls: only we three alive in the southern hush.

In the meantime the sun had set and had wound up in its gold, as a spider winds up its prey, the buzzing center of memory and seemed to consecrate it. The courtesan's voice became sweeter little by little, and her head like that of an oriental priestess seemed comfortable in languid poses. The black magic of evening, sly girlfriend of the criminal, was the procurer for our dark souls and its splendors seemed to promise a mysterious reign. And the priestess of sterile pleasures, the ingenuous and greedy maidservant and the poet all watched each other, barren souls unwittingly looking for the problem of their lives. But the evening only sent down a golden message from the fresh shudderings of the night.

Night came, and the conquest of the serving girl. Her amber body her voracious mouth her bristling black hair at times the revelation of lust in her terrified eyes complicated a fantastic situation. Sweeter meanwhile, and already just about to die out, the memory still reigned in the distance of the per-

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suasive courtesan, still queen in her classic line among the great sisters of memory: after Michelangelo had bent her down again on her tired knees tired from her journey she who bends, who bends but will not lie down, barbarous queen under the weight of the whole human dream, and the battering of arcane and violent poses of the overthrown queens of antiquity who heard Dante extinguish himself in Francesca's cry there on the banks of rivers which exhausted from wars open their mouths, while on their own banks love's everlasting pain is recreated. And the serving girl, the ingenuous Magdalene of the bristly hair and brilliant eyes, was begging with tremors of her barren, golden body, crude and savage, sweetly closed in the humility of her mystery. The long night full of the deceits of various images.

The old images appeared at the silver gates of the first adventures, sweetened by a life of love, to protect me again with their smiles of ineffable mystery and tenderness. The closed halls were opened where light falls in a steady sheet to infinity in the mirrors, forbidden images of courtesans appearing in their sphinx-like posturings out of the reflected pale light: and once more everything that had been arid and sweet, the unpetalled roses of youth, returned to full bloom on the skeletal panorama of the world.

In the gunpowder smell of festival night, the last clanging dying away down the air, I saw the young girls of antiquity, those of the first illusion, appear clearly in the middle of the bridges that jut out from the city to the suburb in the torrid summer nights: faces turned to a three-quarters view, listening to the insistent clanging from the suburb announcing the tongues of fire in uneasy lamps boring through a night sky already full of orgiastic lights: now sweetened: in the already-dead and rose-blushed sky, unburdened by the veil of light: thus Saint Marta, instruments broken on the ground, the song already hushed across the ever-green landscapes that the heart of Saint Cecelia tunes with the Latin sky, soft and pink near the old twilight resting in the heroic line of great Roman

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women. Memories of gypsies, memories of long-ago loves, memories of music and light: exhaustions of love, sudden exhaustions on a pensione bed long ago, another adventurous cradle of uncertainty and regret: thus all that was once more sterile and sweet, the roses of youth unpetalled and dry, sprang up on the skeletal panorama of the world.

In the evening of flamebursts from the summer festival, in a white and delicious light, when our ears just barely rested in the silence and our eyes were tired from the garlands of fireworks, from the multicolored stars that left an acrid smell of gunpowder, a beautiful reddish weight everywhere in the air, walking side by side made us weary exalting in our own too-diverse beauty, she thin and delicate and dark, pure of eye and face, the dazzle of the necklace lost on her bare throat, walking now with hesitant steps clutching a fan. She was attracted to the tent: her white gown undulated in thin blue jerks through the diffuse light and I followed the pallor burning her forehead under her dark bangs. We went in. Dark, autocratic faces, serene again in the illusion of childhood and the festival, turned toward us, profoundly clear in the light. And we watched the scene, everything a spectral unreality. There were skeletal overviews of the city. Bizarre dead bodies looked up at the sky in stiff postures. A rubber odalisque breathed in a low voice and turned her idol's eyes around the room. And the sharp smell of sawdust that muted footsteps and the continual tide-like whispering of the young women of the town astonished at the mystery. "Is it Paris, then? There's London. The Battle of Mukden." We looked around: it must have been late. All those things seen through the magnetic eyes of the lenses in that dream light! Motionless next to me I felt her grow strange and withdrawn while her fascination deepened under the dark bangs of her hair. She moved. And I felt with a bitter twinge which was immediately consoled that I would never be near her again. I followed her then as you follow a dream you love in vain: thus we had become suddenly far apart and strangers to each other after the tumult of the festival, in front of the skeletal pano-

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rama of the world.

I was in the shadow of an arcade which dripped drop after drop of blood-gorged light through the fog of a December night. Without warning a door was flung open in a splendor of light. In the foreground of the far end of the room in the luminescence of a red ottoman an old courtesan was lying up on one elbow, her head resting in her hand, her brown eyes like brown fire, her breasts enormous: beside her a young girl on her knees, alabaster and thin, hair cut into bangs down her forehead, a youthful grace, her legs smooth and uncovered beneath her shimmering gown; and over her, over the serious thoughtful courtesan with young eyes a curtain, a white lace curtain, a curtain that seemed to move images, the images above her, the pure clean images over the thoughtful old courtesan with young eyes. Beaten by light from the shadows of the arcade gorged drops of blood-light falling over and over I stared compelled and amazed at the symbolic and daring grace of the scene. It was already late, we were alone and between us a fierce intimacy was born and the courtesan with the young eyes who lay at the far end of the room under the moving white lace curtain talked to me. Her life was a long sin: lust. Lust but still full of an unsatisfiable curiosity for her. "The female peppered him with kisses from the right side: why from the right? Later the male pigeon stayed overhead, immobile?, ten minutes. Why?" The questions remained unanswered, as pushed by nostalgia she remembered her past over and over again. Until the conversation languished and the voice had died out around us, the mystery of sensuality having reclothed whomever it had reinvoked. Upset, tears blearing my eyes in front of the white lace curtain I kept on following the white fantasies. The voice had gone silent around us. Then she had gone. The voice had gone silent. Certainly I had heard her brushing past in destroying silence. In front of the curtain of crumpled lace the young girl was still resting on her alabaster knees, bending bending with the grace of an acolyte to love.

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Faust was young and handsome and had curly hair. Women from Bologna at that time resembled Siracusean medallions and the slant of their eyes was so perfect that they loved to appear immobile in order to contrast harmoniously with their long brown curls. It was easy to run into them at night in the dark streets (when the moon lit up the streets) and Faust would raise his eyes to the gables of the houses which looked in the moonlight like question marks and then would stare pensively at the diminishing trail of the girls' footsteps. From the old tavern where the students gathered he sometimes liked to hear among the calm talk of the Bologna winter, cold and foggy like his own, and the snap and crack of the wooden logs and the dart and flash of the flames on the ochre vaults and sometimes the hurried footsteps under the near arches. He loved then to gather himself in song while the young waitress in her red petticoats, and with her beautiful cheeks under her smoky hair-do walked back and forth in front of him. Faust was young and handsome. On a morning like that, from the little wallpapered room, among refrains from the player piano and a floral arrangement, from the little room I had heard the crowd rush by and the dark noises of winter. O I remember!: I was young, my hand never just quietly holding up my indecisive face, kind from anxiety and exhaustion. In those days I unburdened myself to the polished, supple dressmaker's dummies, consecrated by my anxiety about supreme love, by the anxiety of all my tormented and thirsty childhood. Everything was mysterious to my faith, my life was entirely "an anxiety about the secret of the stars, everything a bowing over the abyss." I was handsome with torment, restless pale thirsting wandering behind the ghosts of that mystery. Then I fled. I lost myself in the tumult of the colossal cities, saw white cathedrals raise themselves in enormous congeries of faith and dreams with their thousand spires in the air, I saw the Alps raise themselves like still grander cathedrals, and full of the great green shadows of firs, and full of the melodies of their rivers and streams in which I heard the song born from the everlastingness of dreams. Up there among the smoky firs in the fog, among their thousand tickings the thousand voices

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of silence a small light came clear among the tree trunks, and I started up on that path of light: I climbed up to the Alps, into the delicate white mysterious backdrop of the countryside. Lakes, up there among the luminous rocks, ponds watched over by the dream's smile, luminous pools the lakes ecstatic from the oblivion that you, Leonardo, dissembled. The stream told me the story vaguely. I stood still among the immobile lances of the firs believing at times I was bringing forth a new melody wild and yet sad perhaps fixing for good the clouds which seemed to slow down curiously for a moment on that bottomless landscape spy on it and then vanish behind the immobile lances of the fir trees. And poor, naked, happy to be poor and naked, to reflect for an instant the landscape like a memory fascinating and horrible deep in my heart I was climbing: and I got there got up there where the Alpine snows blocked my path for good. A young girl was bathing in the stream, bathing herself and singing in the white snows of the Alps. She turned, accepted me, and in the night she loved me. And still in the background the Alps the white delicate mystery, lit the purity of the stellar lamp in my memory, and the light of love's night burned on.

But which nightmare still weighed all my youth down? O the kisses the vain kisses of the young girl bathing, bathing and singing in the white snows of the Alps! (tears came to my eyes with her memory). I heard the still-distant stream: it poured down soaking ancient and desolate cities, streets long silent, empty as after a pillaging. A golden warmth in the shadow of the present room, a lavish head of hair a death-rattling nightmarish body in the mystic night of the age-old human animal. The handmaiden was sleeping the oblivion of her own dark dreams: like a Byzantine icon, like an Arabian myth the uncertain pallor of the curtain whitened the background.

And then fictions of a very old and free life, of enormous solar myths and massacres that created themselves before my spirit. I saw an old image again, a skeletal form alive because of the great force of a barbarous myth, eyes abyss-like and

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changing glaring with dark blood, in the dream's torture discovering the vulvanized body, two spots two bullet holes on her extinct breasts. I thought I heard the guitars shudder over there in the board-and-branch shack on the lonely fields of the city, a candle throwing light on the bare ground. In front of me a wild matron stared me down without batting an eyelash. The light was weak on the bare ground in the quivering of the guitars. To one side on the blossoming treasure of a young dreaming girl the old woman now clung like a spider while seeming to whisper words in my ear I couldn't make out, words sweet as the wordless wind of the Pampas that sinks you. The wild matron had grabbed me: my indifferent blood had certainly been drunk by the earth: and now the light was even weaker on the bare ground under the metallic breath of the guitars. Suddenly the freed young girl breathed out her childhood, her eyes as soft and piercing as the abyss, languid in her wild grace. And grace grew weaker on the back of the beautiful young thing the shadow of her watery hair and the august mane of the tree of life weaving itself into the ending on the bare ground the guitars inviting a distant sleep. One could hear clearly a leap of wild horses from the Pampas a pawing in the earth, could hear clearly the wind rise, the pawing seeming to be drowned out in the roar of infinity. In the square of the open door the stars flashed brilliantly red and hot in the distance; the shadow of the wild ones in shadow.

II. The Voyage And Return

Voices rose, and other voices, and children's songs and songs of lust, through the twisted little streets inside the burning shadow, to the hill to the hill. In the shadow of the green lamps the white colossal prostitutes dreamed dreams of longing in a light made fantastic by the wind. The sea poured out its salt into the wind which the wind mixed and washed in the lust-smell of the alleys, and the white Mediterranean

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night joked with the huge shapes of the women while the flame's bizarre death-attempts went on and on in the lamp's cave. They watched the flame and sang songs about hearts in chains. All the preludes were quieted now. The night, the stillest joy of the night had fallen. The Moorish doors loaded up and twisted themselves with monstrous black wonders while, in the distance the dark blue dredged a small harbor of stars. Lonely the night now sat on her throne bedizened and fired with all her swarm of stars and flame. In front like a monstrous wound a street deepened. At the sides of the door's angle, white caryatids of a false heaven dreamed away their faces resting on the palms of their hands. She had the pure imperial line in her profile and her throat was bound about with the splendor of opals. With the quick imperial gesture of youth she drew her light dress in one movement over her shoulders and her window shimmered in expectation until shadows closed it softly into a double shadow. And my heart was starved for dreams, for her, for the evanescent one like evanescent love, the love-donor of the doors, caryatid of destiny's heaven. On her divine knees, on her body pale as a dream come forth from the innumerable dreams of the shadows, among the innumerable deceiving lights, the ancient friend, the eternal Chimera held in her red hands my red and ancient heart.

Return. In the room where I had embraced her shapes revealed by the curtains of light, a lingering breath: and in the twilight my unsullied lamp stars my wandering heart with memories again. Faces, faces whose eyes laughed in the dreamflower, you young charioteers on the weightless dream-streets you garlanded so zealously: O fragile poems, O garland of night-loves . . . A song breaks from the garden like the weak link in a chain of sobs: the vein is open: dry and red and sweet is the skeletal panorama of the world.

O your body! Your perfume veiled my eyes: I didn't see your body (a sweet and acute perfume): there in the great empty mirror, in the great empty mirror veiled by violet

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smoke, at the top, kissed by a star of light was the beautiful, the beautiful and sweet gift of a god: and the timid breasts were stuffed with light, and the stars were absent, and there wasn't a God in the night of violet love: but you light as down you sat on my knees, night-breathing caryatid of an enchanted heaven. Your body an airy gift on my knee, and the stars in hiding, and there was no God in the night of violet love: but you in the night of violet love: but you with your violet eyes lowered, you to an unknown night sky which had already ravished one melody of caresses. I remember, love: light as a dove's wings your limbs resting on my own noble limbs. They breathed happily, breathing their own beauty, my limbs breathing a clearer light in your obedient cloud of divine reflections. O don't burn them! don't burn them! Don't burn them: all is vanity vain is the dream: all is in vain all is dream: Love, spring of the dream you are alone you are alone who appears in the veil of violet smoke. Like a white cloud, like a white cloud next to my heart, O stay O stay O stay. Don't sadden O sun!

I opened the window to the night sky. Men like wandering spirits: they wandered like ghosts: and the city (the streets the churches the squares), composed itself in a cadenced dream, as if through an invisible melody sprung from that wandering. Therefore wasn't the world inhabited by sweet spirits and wasn't the dream awakened again in the night in all its triumphant powers? Which bridge, we asked silently, which bridge have we thrown across to the infinite, so that everything appears to us as a shadow of eternity? To which dream have we raised the nostalgia of our beauty? The moon rose in her old robe behind the Byzantine church.

III. The End

In the pleasant warmth of the red light, inside those closed rooms where light sinks flat inside the mirrors to infinity the whiteness of lace blooms then withers away. The concierge in

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the cast-off luxury of a green jerkin, the lines of her face kinder, her eyes which in their brightness hide the dark guards the silver door. You feel the indefinite fascination of love. A mature woman is in control sweetened by a life of love a smile on her face a lovely glimmer in her eyes the memory of the flashing tears of sensuality. They pass during her vigil, rich with messengers of love, light spools weaving multicolored fantasies, they wander about, luminous dust that rests in the enigma of mirrors. The concierge guards the silver door. Outside is the night leafy with silent songs, pale love of the wanderers.

translated from the Italian by Charles Wright

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Claude Mouchard

Black Animal Dependency

1.

Its pupils (I see them now, violet) were actual holes.

Terrified, one paw raised, trembling on the ciment edge of the threshold, it whispered, down in the snow—blue fluctuating flute.

(The hushed being ran between us, dead.

This being of bone, unhooked without echo . . .)

A forced mydriasis opened it, black dog, to the wind of the pale dusk.

Mythic inner shadow

(the one we like to think is hidden, with its odors of porcelain, its holes of lunar water, in the fish-box of the cranium, under the bronze glass of the eyes)

it could only drink, tortured—and meek.

I shoved it into the brown snow, between the hedges of cardboard green dwarf cypress.

I felt it, heart against my calf, see the milky space.

* * *

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Blind (after an absurd tranquilizer shot), it knew itself to be,
in this Easter night luminous and chill, devourable:
a cut-out, on top of the snow.

Its black nostrils were granulose—like the pulp of a mulberry.

It wanted me.

And I carried it for a second. Its paws stiffened, like the ones a bird stretches in distress, ringed.

Fragile femoral artery against my jacket.

* * *

We had not tolerated (for our children, we said to each other . . . because our children were ill) to see it drool for hours on the red tiles,

in this freezing spring when radiators overheating held hair-nets of dust up against the ceiling.

And we had taken it—human couple, lever of fear—to the veterinarian on duty, colonial fool fingering mauve alcohols under a ceiling of wood smeared with whitewash.

* * *

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It wanted me there, made me afraid.

It was an unqualifiable flesh (blue cooked artichoke-heart)—
mixture of the necessary and the extra.

It began to freeze me in what I had always dreaded:
the precise realization, ironic and tragic, in a body fried with suffering,

of what I myself would have prepared, casually, arbitrarily
(large red child, bubble of nearness:
ogre: me?).

The animal—not created by me, not invented, but real, anterior—and that nevertheless I had forced to be there (tearing it from a refuge swollen with blue and red mist, laundromat of assassins),

sent through me

a silent land, grey and cold, hostile.

What ground, in me, through it, around us both, in the street, undulated—active, judging, snuffed-out?

What, under a flow of green black sky, sought to breathe no more?

(And then beyond what black bar, beyond what extinction, did I carefully have to reconstitute verbal mounds of snow—to let them finally fall back down into a sugary powder of adjectives?)

* * *

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2.

The Bet

The animals, inside the house, do not make a pact with me.
No clarification. Red realism.
What do they expose, there where the house hungers?

They hardly appear to keep their blood under a thin membrane.

They play their raw flesh

—strips of liver skin, supple ears, odors too forward—

to impose on me the memory of my wanting them here.

Almost a red and white butchery. The odor of blood so crudely played is insolent—to whomever, a man in his clothes, leaning, wants the unseen, the grey passage through each face-to-face . . .

And them, they only sleep—halos of hot plumage—housed in the fear they inspire in me of propagating, immediate and so fresh
an eventual bloody caprice on my own.

* * *

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Realism

From outside, from the bottom of black,
the odorous crudity of cat envelops our ground.

Coming in at night, it breathes the aureoles of our family simultaneity.

It gives, rough in the dry grass, an additional reality to the prepared essence of the house.

Do I hallucinate its . . . realism?

Our possession of the place

(the black bulk of the house is riddled with yellow, and we move around inside, painted in light)

it identifies this, drinks it—in the orange oil of its look.

Whimpering softly, it calls to the ground
we project—"together"—in spite of ourselves
in spadefuls of shadow onto every other presence.

Our being is united in it. Us?

Sensorium felis: sky where we freeze, blue-brown.

It forces us reveals us, makes us shine like a hook.

Like the corner of a dark field in the night full of moon.

* * *

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Heart

Indiscernibly outside or in,
sliding on the ledge of the house,
the cat installs, in the oil (it bears motionless) of its look,
under the veinlets deep within the skin,
a being of mauve earth
that can only be ours,
that we know obscurely is held there.

We—autonomous, manipulating lights and walls—how can we live knowing ourselves to be, in it, these brown cardiac transcendentals whom it has ingested and who beat:

what it could only be detached from by death
(blood burst in the mixed-up dirt at the far end of the garden)?

Bitter, arrogant dependency.

(Barking, from hill to hill . . . Islands. Yellow creeks.)

* * *

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3.

Will I discover
—reimmersed through the animals in what is prepared—
opening (under their pressure) my eyes in the rose cast-iron
mist where we, the family, must live,
a fatal connection of sacrifice,
a grey woman-eating light, to die of fatigue from?

Something opaque and very close does not stop—changing
cloud under the house—being devoured.
And when I catch sight of this constant effort, blind, and
when I have to ask myself where I am in terms of it,
then I want the dog to be afraid—of me?

* * *

To what perception
did I want to force the animals gathered here,
or rather did I want to compel them to force me into?
(Mark's cows, you can say they're necessary.
—And yet, even they (their sides scaly with shit or
sometimes too washed, fuming), rounded up, in the eve-
ning, under their bottom-heavy roof, on the other side of
the path, gave us, him and me, when we finally closed the
door (dinner, T.V.), a pinch in the ribs, insomniac stitch
in the side . . .

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As for me, at any rate, nothing forced me, in a foolish dream, to haul from the market this crate tied up around three stupified black hens.

The chicken coop, ever since, at the other end of the yard, I can't seem to "keep it up."

Blue-violet sore always being scratched. The hens, muddy, with an eye of a young lady's pearl, extend their necks, in winter, toward the red glowing house.

I carry them bread dipped in warm milk in an orange plastic pail—across the snow,

and then I forget them, irresistibly, my head pulled back, looking in a different field of vision . . .

Flute notes cooing.

A frozen egg yoke, on the ground . . .

My dog comes up, sniffing.

On the snow: its absurd black torso sewing machine.

* * *

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Did I have to bring down these animals here (several have died, from different causes),

this fan of flesh (animals we eat, those we do not eat), the mud of their stare,

did I need this visual violet melange
to see what, in our soil, stops me cold?

Can I perceive, in the translucence of plume and pelt,

the black cud giving us calm?

Can I breathe, with them, what, living, one can only wish to be ensnared in,

what is not lighter after being said,

the color every gesture displays,

frightening confines?

translated from the French by Linda Orr

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The Easter We Lived in Detroit

Janet Kauffman

The best day I remember was the Easter we lived in Detroit, locked in the apartment all day. The furniture, the rugs, began to breathe. Geraniums hummed. I thought, so this is a lively place. It's what happens when somebody's got a chance to think.

Early, about seven o'clock, I said to my husband, Loren, it's bright out, which was at first a complaint. But Loren can sleep with the sun in his eyes; he didn't wake. I believe it's more natural, though, with the eyes closed, to be in the dark, and that is why, very deliberately, when the sunlight compressed itself from a general glow to a four-cornered field next to the bed, I got up and pulled down the green shades in both rooms. The floorboards were cool or warm, depending where I stepped, and checking around, I found a warmed-up spot near the living-room window where I stood for a while with my feet pressed flat, so the heat moved upwards through my ankles. My feet are spongy and pale, the white kind of feet that sculptors put at the ends of women's legs. I know what

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luxury-living means, soaking them in the sun.

In the kitchen, I took a blue-painted egg from the refrigerator, poured some milk, and let my eyes travel the walls in the indoor light. It was greenish, undersea light, very mild. I peeled the egg and sliced it with a steak knife onto a big plate, where the two halves slid together. They arranged themselves, it certainly seemed to me then, as down-hearted, pitying eyes. I just whispered, don't you worry. Not today.

The air was unusually pretty, iridescent. The watercolor light of the room washed into the milk and swirled some pastels; the white of the egg shone aquamarine. Through the plumbing, or through the floors, I heard the rush of water falling, and I washed the knife, to add to it, and even after I'd set the knife off to one side to dry, I let the water run, full force, from the faucet into the drain, for somebody's pleasure down below. Noises coming from far away, I decided then, the ones that have nothing to do with your life, can be more important than anything anyone says in your own ear. It may be for that kind of reason, too, I turned on the radio, for the noise of the Easter broadcasts, a Sunday sound which seemed to come from a great distance and out of some other scenery. I've advised Loren, many Sundays, listen, they're dreamy. You shouldn't mind it, I tell him. Let them pursue happiness, that's what I say about that. But he won't listen.

For Easter, "92 Rock" was given over to a man with a damaged, smoker's voice who read haltingly, like a beginning reader, the story about the women at the tomb, where the rock had rolled away, making a space as wide as a door. I kept the sound low and listened off and on; and since I knew the story anyway, I could picture very clearly the roundness of the rock and the dark hole in the hill. It was desert there, with no trees, and the soil thin and shallow, with bedrock practically under your feet, so that caves were used as tombs. Or was it for criminals only that caves were tombs? I don't recall ever hearing the full explanation.

I sat in the kitchen eating the egg. With the radio on and the light in the rooms going green to gold, the morning just lulled—it held itself steady, unattached to things in the room, and I tell you I sat with my back against the back of

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the chair, content as a queen who, when the palace was ransacked, carried off her own throne and set it somewhere in the woods. She was worn out; she didn't have a thing; but there she was.

I chewed and swallowed and let the cells of my brain go to work. I thought, this is an opportunity. You can't think in bed. You can't think on the radio. But I sat still and the less I moved, the more I noticed how, one after another, the thoughts lined up, linked themselves, and ran together like frames of a moving picture. I sat there and let it happen.

Of course, in the past, I had given thought to a number of things. I'd thought about Loren, who'd lost, or surrendered, the use of his hands. I'd thought about that, from all of the angles. And with the *Free Press* delivered every day, I paid attention to events, foreign or domestic, violent or nonviolent, since it all counts in the end. And, lately, I'd also tried to decide how it happened that during the winter our daughter Patty had made me a grandmother at thirty-four, for God's sake, but that was a simple matter of arithmetic, and not so surprising considering she'd run off from school the day before Thanksgiving vacation with the evangelical Mr. Stutz, the book burner with the megaphone, the one the *Free Press* called the Noisemaker. The paper said in one article that Patricia Dove, 224 N. Grand River, described this Mr. Stutz as "a person you trust through and through." What is harder to understand, when you think about it, is the fact that I didn't know, as of Easter, if the grandchild was boy or girl—I'd never seen it, and never would see it—because Patty was keeping the child for God. *Harboring* was her word on the phone. I am harboring the child for God. I'd thought after that about harboring, about crimes perpetrated, one way and another.

All of this thinking led nowhere. It knotted up. My mind kept a list of concerns, a mix, like a canned soup label with a long paragraph of ingredients, so that you wonder as you taste it if all those things are really necessary.

But the Easter we lived in Detroit, it was a clear, surging day from the start, with fair-weather clouds crossing the window-square above the sink, an outside activity that re-

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called to any human who looked these clear-minded conclusions: one, the blue patch was, in fact, sky—blue by its own rules; and, two, the prevailing winds still held.

It was easy to look around. To the right of the living-room door, on the metal radiator cover, was the spider plant; and to the left, on a shelf, was Patty's junior picture, in a cardboard frame—she had her father's straight brown hair, parted in the middle. From where I was, with a slow, continuous turning, I could take in the sofa, which was red plaid, a decent-looking thing where Loren usually sat to watch T.V., and on through the bedroom door I could see Loren's feet at the end of the bed, his toes pointing up, slightly outward. I could look at his feet. Separate objects in the rooms, even though I kept them separate and shadowed with thick lines like the crayon lines of a child's drawing, were nonetheless part of a train of thought. Even a small thing, a book, or a scrap of dust in the corner, took up a quantity of space, and the room seemed full of things to be seen and space to be seen between. When I looked at something, I saw it. I noticed on the wall space next to the front door the old photograph of my grandmother standing beside a newly-planted pine tree, holding me, her youngest grandchild, a baby over her shoulder. The frame was oval, gold metal. In the picture, my head was blurred, turned away, and smudged into the sky of the background. I decided: this is a picture of the pine tree, that's what. I was glad to know it. Count the years, you can figure the tree has grown into something huge, very dark, in somebody's back yard. It is probably so dark, day or night, it looks like empty space.

I decided if I saw Patty again, I'd give her the picture.

On the radio, the man's voice stumbled, mispronouncing *sepulchre*—you'd have thought it was a brand-new story for him. He coughed, trying to cover up, and went on.

Years ago, when Patty was a child small enough to hold on one arm, I remember holding her on Christmas morning and telling her it was the day Jesus was born, and she said, very sweet and mournful in my ear—yes, she'd heard about Him, she'd heard they put Him in a tube. A tube! Well, you can

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understand that when she was swept up last fall with the Noisemaker, I thought I'd lighten things up and remind her of her first Christian knowledge. But she couldn't laugh. She said, Mother, shame. What's shame, I said. You think your Jesus couldn't take a joke, I said. Knowing what *He* knows, I said. But Patty's a serious girl; she always was.

A choir sang. I stretched my legs and shoulders, crackling vertebrae in my back, and I remembered I hadn't got the paper yet from the hall. With the mid-morning noises from outside—cars braking for the light and gunning off, a whistling kettle across the alley—I could move around easily without waking Loren. I unlocked the front door, picked up the paper, and locked the door again. Even while it was folded, I could see the *Free Press* had a very predictable three-color picture on the front page, of a mountainside near Jerusalem, where a touring dramatic club had staged an Easter pageant. Except for the winged angel who sat on one side, the scene came close to the one of the tomb I had pictured myself.

After the headlines, I slid myself back into bed, where the sheets on my side had cooled, and I pushed against Loren, curling myself to his back like a shadow, which he had occasion to notice, and he said, here, Mummy, here you go. He rolled over to me with what I would call real intent. I don't deny that I had been thinking, too, a kind of a thought: dear God, a double bed and two bodies in it—Easter—and no place to go.

Loren was forty-two. He claimed his hands were dead hands, although they were very beautiful, and patterned with veins and with criss-crossed lines in the shape of stars on his knuckles. Sometimes he let his hands hang from his wrists as if they'd been chopped off and reattached with a hidden stitching. Every day he would set the hands flat on the table top and look at them. With a snap of his elbows, he'd flip the hands over and examine the palms. They looked fine to me. But he'd study them as if any time he expected them to move against his will. I think he'd prepared himself to recalculate,

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at the moment that happened, everything he knew. He didn't use the word *miracle*, but I think he believed one had already hit him, and that possibly it would happen again and undo itself. If he'd been a scientist with the habit of tracking an idea down, instead of a welder, he might have been able to figure out what was what. But being the man he was, he veered. He wasn't a bitter man, but he couldn't put two and two together. He learned to stare. When he saw something going on, when he saw Patty pack up the red suitcase and leave, for example, he stood in the doorway and flicked his head as if he were snapping his welder's helmet in place, and having trouble with it. But he didn't blink; and he didn't say anything more than goodbye. By Easter, I'd allowed myself to admit that I lived with a vacated Loren, a shadowy man who'd discovered silence and who made love much more carefully now.

Loren liked to read the paper and he read every column, including the ones in the Business section. After I gave him breakfast, he sat with the paper in his lap, the back pages propped against the table. While he read and while the radio man talked on, I washed dishes. From the kitchen, I didn't mind watching him. The past can cut itself off very smoothly. It's possible that Loren's life from birth had been surrounded with a silence nobody noticed, and I certainly never noticed, until he wasn't working. But then the quiet accumulated; it polished him, waxy and definite. That Easter morning, at a distance of twenty feet, I could see the capsules, like layers of color, around him. I took some time, looking at him. I watched him the way you watch, unpitying, an insect going its own way in the alley, working its legs over chunks of gravel. You feel lucky just to see it.

"It's the Noisemaker," Loren said. "Here's where she is." He nodded and pointed with his forehead to an article in the paper.

"So. So," I said. I read the article over Loren's shoulder. It was a brief note: Richard Stutz, 28, arraigned for trespassing,

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breaking and entering, and malicious destruction of property, after an incident at the Allegan High School. Rock and roll records, brand name articles of clothing, books—some of them stolen out of the library—had been heaped on a bonfire in the schoolyard. Apparently, Mr. Stutz had broken a window in the library, climbed in, and thrown out selected titles. The article didn't mention his megaphone, but I knew it was there, calling from inside the building, describing each step, naming each book as he pulled it off the shelf. There was no mention of Patty; I didn't expect any. She'd have been somewhere out of sight. And nothing about the Noisemaker's baby.

"She's in Allegan," Loren said.

"I'll look it up."

On the Rand-McNally map, Allegan was marked in the western fruit-growing area, a greenish strip with grey hatching. The whole section was stamped with small, rounded trees, the symbol for orchards and vineyards.

"Drop her a line," Loren said. "Maybe in care of the Court House?" He pushed at the paper and flipped the page.

The letter was simple to write. I wasn't very hopeful about it, one sheet of paper, but I knew it wouldn't hurt. After a certain point, nothing hurts. In the living room, bright streaks from the sun came in around the shades, and I snapped them up and let the daylight in, a liquidy milk sort of light that flowed across the room, straight for the table. But it was cool, and I moved the Olivetti from the sewing table into the lighted space opposite Loren. Without planning ahead what to say, I started in, typing at my top speed, which is above average, and which Loren sometimes smiles at, as if the tapping noise and the running of fingers from key to key means something different to him.

I can tell you exactly what I wrote, because I have the letter here. It came back after a month. Someone had opened it up and taped it shut. I don't know who.

I told Patty it was Easter and did she remember that. I told her just because she was in the orchards and not in a desert

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region not to feel left out of it all, that I didn't. Loren, at this point, said to say hello, and I typed in: Patty, your father says hello. When I saw those words, I knew that Patty, because of the Noisemaker, would think about God the Father, that's how she thinks, and that is why I went on with this talk about her father. I told her, your father is right here, across the table from me. You know who I'm talking about. You know who your father is, I told her. And I know who your baby's father is, Richard Stutz. Think about this, Patty. I am your mother, and you are your baby's mother. My guess is, I told her, the baby is a boy. I asked her point-blank. I am your mother, and I ask you, Patricia, would you harbor a girl for God. Oh no, I told her. You were *my* little girl, I told her, and I harbored you for *nobody*. Look at yourself. You're grown up. I told her to sit down in the sunlight somewhere to read the letter and remember, as she well knew, that she was a daughter of mine and of her father's, that's whose. God doesn't want your baby any more than God wanted you. I tried to say it plain. Sometimes when you think the worse, you have to say it. I told her I didn't know where she was but I thought she should walk the baby boy on the beach and tell it who its father and mother were, and who its grandmother and grandfather were. Tell him his grandmother has new white capped teeth, better than anything you'd believe, and that his grandfather says hello from Detroit. Sit in the sand all afternoon, I told her, and think. I told her, do you really believe God has the chance to think the way we do? None of this will surprise you, I said. We are thinking of you. Your father, who is no better, is also no worse, and he says, fare thee well, which he did say. He also said, be gentle now, but I didn't check back. I said, be well, my dearest one. With love, your mother.

Loren and I finished reading the paper. At noon, he took a nap, which went on all afternoon. I opened the living-room window and sat on the sill, listening to the radio. The window had no screen; I could open it wide and sit there, watching the space over the roofs, where the light of the morning held on. It was a pale light that slowed people down and hushed

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them up. Kids on bicycles riding no-hands swerved smoothly and turned up the alley as if their bikes were on automatic. Nobody shouted to anybody.

For supper, I cooked a steak, and we watched the news on T.V. A reporter outside a crumbled building in Jerusalem said that no incidents of violence disrupted the Christian holiday.

"No violence here either," I said to Loren.

He shook his head.

After the news, I turned on the radio again and we had our ice cream. Loren went to the window. On the radio a preacher was saying, it fills us with amazement, *amazement*, he said, that Jesus rose up from the arms of death. He was dead, he was in the tomb, but he rose up and walked again. The preacher sounded so surprised.

Loren sat down on the sill with his arms in his lap and watched the street. Listen, Mummy, he said. Turn off the radio. Look.

I turned it off and walked over beside him. There were sirens. A haze had wound itself over the city, gauzy and pinkish-orange.

Loren leaned back against the window frame and I sat opposite. I told him I'd had a whole day to study what was on my mind, and see, I came through it. It didn't surprise me that a person who knew what God knew, given the time to think, would throw over the idea of staying dead, and come back, and keep on going.

Loren said, hold my hand. I took his hand and I held it up to my mouth. All of his fingers pointed to the ground. The skin on his arm was soft, untanned, with fine brown hair, and I drew my tongue across the hairs.

The sirens moved in and then came blue flashing lights, headed downtown. Patty's letter lay somewhere behind me, in the middle of the table, sealed and stamped. Loren and I sat on the windowsill while the dark took over the living room and took over the ground outside, too. The dark, which is like a shelter around each person, is a lovely thing to see, once you see it.

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among my closest friends; the idea of the anthology was conceived one late evening when he and his wife Zita were staying with us in ~~North Wales~~ Bwlch Oeyn. They were also among our first weekend guests in Verte Rive, together with Michael Foot (another close friend of the period) and his wife, ~~Sitttx~~ Jill. Dick was a brilliant, outgoing and warm personality, but he was also an incurably opportunistic politician, as his diaries while a Cabinet Minister quite plainly revealed. Thus it is amusing to read in his Introduction to the book, after describing that evening in Wales when the project had been hatched: "We were not in the least interested... in swelling the flood of anti-Communist propaganda". That of course was precisely what we were interested in, but for a Labour M.P. in those days it just wouldn't do to say so in as many words. At any rate, The God That Failed (the title was invented by Dick) became a kind of household word and seemed to have been quite effective in "swelling the flood of anti-Communist propaganda", to judge by the number of reprints and foreign translations.

~~Verte Rive solved the problem where to live, at least for the time being; it did not solve that other problem, what to live for - in other words what type of book to write.~~ When I finished my piece for The God That Failed, I thought I had at last done with writing on political subjects for the rest of my life. I had been labouring under the same illusion when I fled London for ~~that lonely sheep farm in~~ Wales to write Insight and Outlook, ~~an essay on the creative process in science, art and humour~~ to the readers I had promised the reader a second volume "which is in preparation and will, it is hoped, appear twelve months after the first." But all I had to show for a Volume Two was a chaotic jumble of notes, the mere sight of which gave me indigestio After a hopeless struggle I had to shelve Volume Two "for the time being". In actual fact, it never saw the light of day. Its place was taken by The Act of Creation, published fifteen years later. In 1949, I was obviously not ready to embark on that rather ambitious undertaking (and no I was ~~That left me~~ free-wheeling in a vacuum as it were. This is when - in July 1949 - a new ~~I started on an autobiography, but after the first chapter got stuck...~~ arrival from Pretoria entered unobtrusively my life. ~~Mamaine's "ill-ness added to my depressions; she was in a London nursing home under the care of a specialist for asthma, whom~~

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x ~~Macmillan, London, and New York, 19..~~ (see Chapter).

A manuscript page from Stranger on the Square *with Arthur Koestler's corrections.*

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Photo: Life/Pat English

The Art of Fiction LXXX*

Arthur Koestler

The Koestler drawing-room is predominantly green with deep green walls. It has an Empire flavor, and there are interesting pieces of Egyptian sculpture in it. On the coffee table is Barbara Pym's Quartet in Autumn *and* The Dancing Wu Li Masters: an Overview of the New Physics.

Koestler is wearing the costume of the old left—rough materials tending to light rather than dark, in his case to greenish, with nothing matching anything else: checked shirt, wool cardigan, tartan tie, tweed jacket, etc.

* The following interview was the last Arthur Koestler granted before his death in March, 1983.

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Sitting very uneasily in a pool of lamplight, Arthur Koestler seemed low. His wife, Cynthia, had opened the front door of their house in London's Montpelier Square. A gentle, soft, sad woman wearing no make-up, she had explained that Mr. Koestler was not at his best; he was recovering from a "viral infection," which is how the Koestlers describe a cold. She is much younger than he and began to work for Koestler in 1949. Cynthia had watched him divorce two previous wives—Dorothy in 1950, Mamaine in 1953—before taking her place officially at his side in 1965. She has the slightly numb Buddhist detachment of one who has spent a lifetime in surrender of her will to another.

From the pool of lamplight Koestler mumbles about not being too well. He casts about in the air a bit, rather abstractedly, then suddenly says, "I used to be a journalist—what is the peg for this interview?"

It is evident that he dislikes being interviewed and, indeed, consistently refuses. "And I'm recovering from a viral infection," he moans as the tape-recorder is set up. He dislikes tape-recorders because, he says, he rambles when he talks. He dislikes appearing on television and radio, "because my accent is too thick and it embarrasses me." When asked about allowing a photographer to come and take a picture, he cocks his head on one side, frowns, and says, "I'd prefer to avoid it." One feels the list of his dislikes is an extended one.

INTERVIEWER

What do you dislike most of all?

ARTHUR KOESTLER

Stupidity more than anything. Including my own.

INTERVIEWER

You were born in Budapest in 1905. Into what kind of family?

KOESTLER

Typical Central European Jewish middle middle. My father

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was Hungarian, my mother Viennese. I reviewed a book once, *Last Waltz in Vienna*. It was about a family such as mine, before the extermination. It's about the hum-drum, day-by-day life before the ceiling fell in.

INTERVIEWER

The ceiling?

KOESTLER

1939, 1942 mostly, Auschwitz.

INTERVIEWER

What did you father do for a living?

KOESTLER

He was an industrialist. He had too much imagination. He financed disastrous inventions like the envelope-opening machine. He said too much time is wasted opening envelopes and big businesses need these machines. So one day a huge machine came into the house. It would have covered half that wall. The inventor came with it. He looked like one of Snow White's seven dwarfs the way he hopped around his machine. It was plugged into the electricity, turned on, there was an enormous clattering and shuddering, then flames started to lick here and there about it and we all got terribly scorched. Another invention he financed was radioactive soap. You must remember the time, 1918-ish, when curative properties were indiscriminately ascribed to radioactivity. The soap was supposed to make you glow with health and vitality, but it didn't catch on.

INTERVIEWER

You were at the university in Vienna in the twenties—did you know Freud?

KOESTLER

I interviewed him in 1938 in London. He died in Hampstead a few years later.

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INTERVIEWER

Was he important to you?

KOESTLER

When you grew up in Vienna you sucked in the ideas of psychoanalysis like mother's milk. My personal discovery of Jung was much later.

INTERVIEWER

Do you feel like an exile?

KOESTLER

When I go to France or Austria, then I feel that I'm abroad, that I'm British to the core. But when I get back here, then I feel a bit of an exile.

INTERVIEWER

An exile from where?

KOESTLER

Central Europe. No, let's say Europe in general because I spent thirteen years of my life in France.

INTERVIEWER

You were in a concentration camp there for four months—was that a useful experience?

KOESTLER

I was in a Spanish prison before that, in a death cell where I didn't know when my turn to be shot was coming. Afterwards the French camp was easy to bear. It taught me among other things the relativity of freedom. Solitary confinement is rock bottom, it's absolute unfreedom. I was in solitary most of the time.

INTERVIEWER

Was that frightening?

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KOESTLER

In fact, I preferred solitary to sharing. It depends on the individual. But it's generally considered rock bottom.

INTERVIEWER

Have you ever felt you were going mad?

KOESTLER

No.

INTERVIEWER

What would be madness for you?

KOESTLER

At Ann Arbor University there was an awfully nice English psychiatrist. It was because he was so nice that I first took the psilocybin mushroom there instead of at Harvard, although I knew Timothy Leary before he went into drugs. I had what is called a very bad trip.

INTERVIEWER

What did you dislike about it?

KOESTLER

Well, it was extremely frightening. When I was under, I noticed that the nice English psychiatrist had a scar on his neck—from a mastoid operation perhaps. His face went green and the scar started gaping as a wound and for some reason I thought, "Now at last the Gestapo have got me." Or was it the K.G.B.? It was one of the two. The psychiatrist had a standard lamp and the base of it suddenly developed bird's claws. Then I flipped for a moment into normality and told myself, "You are hallucinating, that's all—if you touch the claws they'll go away." So I touched them. But they didn't go away. Not only a visual but also a tactile hallucination. It was very frightening. So when you ask me what madness is—it is when your perceptions are dramatically deviating from reality. That is not a scientific definition however. When I came back from

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this experience of induced schizophrenia, the after-effects lasted for several months. Timothy Leary went round the bend of course. I came to the opposite view to Huxley's. These things have no particular spiritual value but they might have clinical value. For example, I think every psychiatrist should have a session with mescalin or LSD in order to know what a psychosis is like, what hallucinations are like. It should be part of the psychiatrist's curriculum.

INTERVIEWER

Why did you choose to go to England in 1940?

KOESTLER

My father was an Anglophile. He had business contacts here, frequently came to England, and told us tales. I had an English "Miss," as it was called—you say "Governess." Then I did journalism for the *News Chronicle*. I was their war correspondent in Spain and Palestine. And when in the war France collapsed in a most shameful way, I had only America or Britain. America was still neutral. So I came to England and enlisted. I had to join the Glorious Pioneers—"Digging for Victory" as their slogans went.

INTERVIEWER

George Orwell thought that a great insult to you, that you couldn't join the real army.

KOESTLER

It was the only regiment open to foreigners, although the French could go into the Free French Army, and the Poles had their own units too.

INTERVIEWER

You lived in Wales for a while.

KOESTLER

North Wales, three years, just about long enough. Then on and off to America after the war. But unlike many men in cir-

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cumstances similar to mine, I didn't put down roots there. When I was in America, it became very obvious to me that I am a European.

INTERVIEWER

What do you like about England?

KOESTLER

The question should be reformulated. What *did* I like about England when I settled here? And what's my feeling now? These are different things.

INTERVIEWER

Are they dramatically different?

KOESTLER

No. It is a continuum. When I settled here, Europe was kaput. England was the only country left. What appealed to me was what Orwell described, those anonymous crowds, gentlemen with walking sticks, old maids bicycling to Holy Communion through the fog and the mist. A nation of darts players, pigeon fanciers. That in 1940 was still very close to the truth.

INTERVIEWER

The British Empire notwithstanding.

KOESTLER

Gentle knobbly faces with bad teeth and so on. Then history made a perverse somersault and it turned out that England was the only country that lost the war. In England you began to have phenomena like skinheads.

INTERVIEWER

You have a farmhouse in Suffolk. Why choose Suffolk?

KOESTLER

We had a house in the Austrian Tyrol for twenty years. Un-

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At left: the Koestler house on Montpelier Square.

Photo: Fay Godwin

Photo: Fay Godwin

Above: Arthur and Cynthia Koestler (with David) in their sitting room.

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til ten years ago. I loved it. Then the tourists caught up with us and the village was ruined. I chose Suffolk to be near Cambridge. Also, I love the climate of East Anglia. You feel very braced by it and vigorous in the daytime, and at nighttime you sleep like a dormouse. Dry continental climate blowing over from Siberia.

INTERVIEWER

You opposed Fascism, then you ditched Communism.

KOESTLER

No, I didn't. Communism ditched me by turning into Stalinism.

INTERVIEWER

Do you have faith in any political philosophy?

KOESTLER

Nothing very original or specific now.

INTERVIEWER

Do you vote? Are you excited by the prospect of voting next time?

KOESTLER

I couldn't be more unexcited. I vote to participate, to play the game. That's all. Please don't let's talk about politics.

INTERVIEWER

Am I being too formal? I get the feeling that I'm being a bit wooden.

KOESTLER

You're doing all right, coping with a strange alien and feeling your way.

INTERVIEWER

Who was the saintliest man you ever met?

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KOESTLER

I've met a lot of saintly people. I walked beside a saint in India. He was the head of the Boodan movement which tried to persuade rich landowners to give their land to the poor. But Indian saints are quite different from Western ones. There were no hospitals until the British came, no concern for the poor. In India a saint is absolutely impervious to suffering—physical or economic.

INTERVIEWER

Who was the most exciting man you ever met?

KOESTLER

One was certainly Vladimir Jabotinski, an extremist Zionist leader. He's dead now. He was in Israel for a couple of years but the British didn't like him at all. Enormous leadership and charisma, an ability to make things happen, but beloved as well as followed.

INTERVIEWER

Do you believe in occultism?

KOESTLER

Do you mean hidden wise men in Tibet? No, no.

INTERVIEWER

Did you ever meet Gurdjieff or Aleister Crowley?

KOESTLER

No.

INTERVIEWER

Are you a religious man?

KOESTLER

Not in a denominational way. I'm attracted by mysticism.

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INTERVIEWER

The Society for Psychical Research, ESP—that sort of thing?

KOESTLER

I do believe that the evidence for telepathy, for example, is overwhelming and that it is a part of reality that is above science. Science allows us to glimpse fragments of reality. There is another level, for the understanding of which our brains are not programed. In other words, there are concepts, such as infinity in space and in time, which science cannot fathom. These concepts belong to a level of reality which is above our heads.

INTERVIEWER

Do you suffer from insomnia?

KOESTLER

No. I used to sleep seven hours a day. Now it's closer to nine, which is one of the disappointments of old age—they always promised one would sleep less. I sleep very well and always have, even in prison. (*Picks up a magazine clipping.*) Look at this. Did you ever see a magazine called the *New Musical Express*? It turns out there is a pop group called the Police—I don't know why they are called that, presumably to distinguish them from the punks—and they've made an album of my essay *The Ghost In The Machine*. I didn't know anything about it until my clipping agency sent me a review of the record.

INTERVIEWER

It was in the *Hit Parade*.

KOESTLER

What's that it was in?

INTERVIEWER

The best-seller list for pop records. Didn't you get a copy of the record?

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KOESTLER

No. I've had no contact with the group.

INTERVIEWER

But obviously you are pleased.

KOESTLER

A rather difficult book has become the inspiration for a pop group. It came as a great surprise to me. I'm slightly tickled by it.

INTERVIEWER

Do you write very easily?

KOESTLER

No. Very hard.

INTERVIEWER

Was German your first language?

KOESTLER

I was bilingual—Hungarian and German. I believe I'm the only writer who *twice* changed the language in which he writes, from Hungarian to German at seventeen years old, and from German to English at thirty-five. Since 1940 I have written only in English. But in any language it is a struggle to make a sentence say exactly what you mean.

INTERVIEWER

Is English better suited to your purposes than German?

KOESTLER

Oh yes, much. English has a muscularity with the fat massaged away. German is a very woolly language. French has a so-called Cartesian lucidity, but it's deceptive because it misses so much, a pseudo-lucidity because . . . no, cross that out, it's getting too complicated.

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INTERVIEWER

What *imaginative writers are important to you?*

KOESTLER

No comment. That's list-making.

INTERVIEWER

What kind of food do you like?

KOESTLER

French.

INTERVIEWER

Are you a good cook?

KOESTLER

I used to be in my bachelor days.

INTERVIEWER

Do you watch television?

KOESTLER

Occasionally. Selectively.

INTERVIEWER

Cinema?

KOESTLER

Less and less. You can't go by car to a movie because of the parking problems. Which means hanging around for taxis—especially afterwards. For me, it's very rare that a movie nowadays is worth all the complications of getting there and back.

INTERVIEWER

Do you have a video machine?

KOESTLER

No.

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INTERVIEWER

You should get one. What was the last film which excited you?

KOESTLER

Close Encounters of the Third Kind was the one I continued to remember afterwards.

INTERVIEWER

What are your vices?

KOESTLER

(*A very long pause.*) Is smoking a vice? I drink the normal amount. Malt whiskey usually. (*An even longer pause.*) Funny, I can't think of any vices. I'm trying but I can't.

INTERVIEWER

You try to be good. Do you succeed?

KOESTLER

Look at that Viking ship over there made out of balsa. For twenty years now there has been something called the Arthur Koestler Award for Prisoners, awarded to prisoners competing with paintings, model-making, writing, etc. It isn't much publicized because there's no point in doing so. That's my do-gooding side.

INTERVIEWER

What are your failures?

KOESTLER

Let's come back to what makes a good man. I don't know what makes a good man. I was active in the campaign for the abolition of capital punishment.

INTERVIEWER

Amnesty International?

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KOESTLER

I'm a member of course, but just in the normal way. I'm Vice President of the Voluntary Euthanasia Society.

INTERVIEWER

Who is the President?

KOESTLER

There isn't one.

INTERVIEWER

Did he kill himself?

KOESTLER

No, there just isn't one at the moment.

Koestler, quite by surprise, begins to make a very peculiar noise, a wailing falsetto half-yodel. "Hoo-ooo-oo." I look about me but detect no obvious reason for it. Here it goes again. "Hoo-oo-ooooo!" with a sort of impatient upcurl in the tail of it. Eventually Cynthia appears up from her private lair downstairs and stands a touch tautly in the doorway of the drawing-room. The wail, presumably, is her summons.

KOESTLER

Can we have some more drinks, angel? Because I want to get on with this. (*Two large watered malt whiskies are eventually produced.*)

INTERVIEWER

Do you take holidays?

KOESTLER

I sometimes displace myself to a sunnier climate but I always take the office with me.

INTERVIEWER

Where to?

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KOESTLER

The South of France, the Austrian Tyrol. I'm always working, you know. Nine-thirty until one. I have much reading to do and I'm a very slow reader, one of my misfortunes. If I'm reviewing a philosophical book it takes me a week to read it.

INTERVIEWER

What are the pleasures of reviewing?

KOESTLER

You force yourself to read very carefully and it triggers off unexpected trains of thought. Also you find yourself reading books you wouldn't normally read.

INTERVIEWER

You've resisted the temptation to become a guru figure but do you get an enormous amount of "problem" mail?

KOESTLER

A huge amount. I don't answer the crank letters. The temptation to become the prophet is very great and very dangerous—it has to be resisted.

INTERVIEWER

Going on television once a week and telling people the answer to life—that sort of thing?

KOESTLER

That does happen to people, you know, and it's very bad. My novel *The Call Girls* has something to do with this. I'm ambivalent about the mail in the morning. It's an awful bind. The fan mail is hell. But no fan mail would be a worse hell.

INTERVIEWER

Are you musical?

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KOESTLER

I listen to music a lot, not very discriminatingly. Not at the opera or at concerts, but on the records. It's one of the few remaining joys in life, you know.

INTERVIEWER

Are you going to write about the silicon chip?

KOESTLER

I don't think so.

INTERVIEWER

Do you read newspapers?

KOESTLER

I read *The Times* and the heavy Sunday papers. I read *The New Scientist*, plus some technical stuff. Over half my work is reading up, you know.

INTERVIEWER

How long have you lived in this house?

KOESTLER

Since 1952.

INTERVIEWER

You were good friends with Orwell. Was he a happy man?

KOESTLER

That was the last thing he was.

INTERVIEWER

What about yourself?

KOESTLER

I'm a happy man only when work goes well.

INTERVIEWER

Will you keep on writing?

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KOESTLER

You know, I would like to die in harness.

INTERVIEWER

What are you working on at the moment?

KOESTLER

Don't want to talk about that. Superstition. Vices . . .

INTERVIEWER

Oh good, you've thought of one.

KOESTLER

I'm a workaholic.

INTERVIEWER

An obsession with not wasting time.

KOESTLER

If I stop working and just try to enjoy myself, I get very neurotic and guilt-ridden. Orwell was the same. Like the man who, if he stops running, becomes afraid. Or the shark which must move to breathe. But I love playing games like Scrabble. That's not wasting time because it's an effort. Like climbing mountains which I used to do too. Everything which is an effort is virtuous, is work, and is worth doing.

INTERVIEWER

Does your family try to persuade you to work less?

KOESTLER

My family is just my wife, Cynthia, and one dog—it used to be two dogs. Cynthia used to be my secretary, so she's part of the work too. A most stabilizing factor in marriage: shared work. (*Stands and walks to bookcase.*) Whenever I get depressed, which I often do, I come over here and look at this. My comforter. If ever I wonder what on earth it was all for, here is the evidence. The thirty books I've written plus all the

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translations. Forty two different languages including English. Croatian, Ukrainian, Norwegian, Telugu . . . Russian? Oh yes, in *samizdat* of course. Naturally, *Darkness At Noon* is my most popular book in Russia. I must have had something to say. There must be something in it after all.

INTERVIEWER

What makes you doubt there was something in it?

KOESTLER

If a writer loses his doubts then he's finished.

INTERVIEWER

Does there come a point when one has to stop doubting?

KOESTLER

Yes, death. But not until. When a writer loses his uncertainties he loses his humility—then he's finished. He'll just go on writing the same book like an idiot.

INTERVIEWER

Looking at that wall of books, are you searching for an answer?

KOESTLER

Oh yes. There is a British astronomer called Sir Thomas Gold. He tells a story of when he was going round America on a lecture tour explaining the Big Bang theory. There's a very old lady at one of the lectures who says, "Mister, I've got a much better theory about the universe. There's a huge tortoise with a thin covering of earth on its back—that's the universe." And Tommy Gold says, "But what is the tortoise standing on?" And she says, "On a much bigger tortoise of course. It's no use arguing, Mister. It's tortoises all the way down." That just about sums it up. The cosmological quest—an infinite series of recessions. Ha!

—**Duncan Fallowell**

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A Koestler Memoir

Introductory Note

On March 3, 1983, the bodies of Arthur and Cynthia Koestler were discovered in the sitting room of their house in Montpelier Square. Koestler was sitting in an armchair, a glass of brandy still in his hand. Cynthia was lying on a sofa. A glass of whiskey was set on the table next to her. Both had taken a massive dose of barbiturates. Both were wearing plastic bags over their heads—an additional device to assure the outcome of a suicide pact.

At the time Koestler was in poor health. For years he had suffered not only from Parkinson's disease but also leukemia.

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His suicide, considering his vice-presidency of the Voluntary Euthanasia Society, was not all that surprising.

Cynthia, on the other hand, was Koestler's junior by twenty-two years. She was in perfect health. In a brief typewritten note she explained her actions: "I should have liked to finish my account of working for Arthur—a story which began when our paths happened to cross in 1949. However, I cannot live without Arthur, despite certain inner resources."

The manuscript of the book she was referring to was discovered among the papers on Koestler's desk. The manuscript was a kind of joint autobiography with alternating chapters by both Koestlers. Edited by Harold Harris, the compilation has been entitled Stranger on the Square *and will be published this fall (Hutchinson of London, and Random House).*

Mr. Harris asks in his introduction, "Why had this intelligent, healthy woman of fifty-five ended her life. . . ?"

"He [Koestler] had never made any secret of the fact that he was difficult to live with. He made frequent references to this fact in his notebooks. He never tried to hide his demanding nature, the violence of his moods, his abrupt changes of direction, his obsessional chasing of women. . . . Behind all that was a man of immense intellect, a man who could show enormous kindness and generosity, a man of incomparable humor, and—most of the time—a companion of the utmost charm.

"There can be no doubt that Cynthia fell in love almost at their first meeting and she loved him for the rest of their lives. From 1955 to the end she shared his life. But even that was not enough. It is hardly an exaggeration to say that his life became hers, that she lived *his life. And when the time came for him to leave it, her life too was at an end."*

The reminiscences which follow are a selection of Cynthia's contributions to Stranger on the Square. *The first, entitled "How Unpleasant to Meet Mr. Koestler," recounts the initial meeting of this painfully shy and rather awkward South African with the famous Koestler—an encounter which would lead to their remarkable if strange romance.*

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from *Stranger on the Square*

Cynthia Koestler

I was born in South Africa on 9 May 1927. Towards the end of January, 1948, I left Cape Town for the last time to join my mother in Paris. As the boat sailed away, I stayed on deck, watching the land recede until all that remained looked like a small plum pudding swathed in mist on the ocean's horizon. I knew I would never return.

In Paris I joined the Alliance Française to brush up my French. Although I had spent a long summer holiday in Normandy in 1938, I had never been to Paris before. When spring came I was infected with the euphoria one never feels with the end of winter in the southern hemisphere. I found a secretarial job at the film company, Warner Brothers. The work, contrary to expectation, turned out to be boring as it had to do merely with the distribution of films. I worked for two American executives who were of German origin and had to correct their rather bad English in the letters they dictated. Perhaps I would have not have been so scornful of this task if I had realized that they had probably been among the lucky ones who had escaped from Germany before the holocaust.

After a couple of months I saw an advertisement in the *Herald Tribune* which appealed to me. A writer was looking for an English secretary, and I eagerly applied for the job. I was a little disappointed when I found out that he was not in my naive view a "real writer" but a psychologist writing a book on Pavlovian theory. His name was Dr. Ishlondsky, he was a White Russian with an American passport, and he lived with his brother in the top-floor flat of a house in the Avenue Georges Mandel, overlooking a sea of chestnut trees which were then in flower. I worked for him every day for a month, typing his book and learning all about Pavlov and his dog-and-bell experiments.

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After three weeks he gave me a week's notice, explaining that he was leaving Paris for the South of France. This was a bolt out of the blue, as he had not told me that the job was a temporary one when he engaged me. After work I walked down to the Trocadero and bought a copy of the *Herald Tribune*. Turning immediately to the Jobs Vacant section, I found the following advertisement: "Author, Fontainebleau area, seeks part-time secretary. Write Box. . . ."

In an instant I was transported from a state of gloom to one of wild excitement. I hurried to the Rond Point where a Romanian friend of mine had a flat, so that I could borrow his typewriter to type out my application. For about an hour I struggled with the wretched machine, but it was an ancient one and, being continental, all the keys were in the wrong place. In the end I gave up and wrote my application by hand as clearly and neatly as I could. Name, date of birth, nationality, education, and jobs. I was quite proud of the long list of jobs: a firm of solicitors, an art gallery, Warner Brothers, and Dr. Ishlondsky. This curriculum vitae was enclosed with a short letter.

What I did not say in this summary of my life was that it had long been my ambition to work for a writer. As a child I was happiest when reading and my favorite people were the imaginary heroes of books rather than those living around me. At twelve, I decided to write a book, a historical romance rather like Georgette Heyer's novels which we all were reading at school at the time. I got away from the other girls by shutting myself up in the loo with a pencil and notebook. The first paragraph would describe the hero—a dashing Regency buck—and the clothes he was wearing. I got as far as his "sky-blue waistcoat," but the words which I expected to flow from my pen never came and I had to give it up. At fifteen I was inspired to write a play: the characters galloped about on their fiery steeds, using expressions like "egad," "methinks," and "forsooth." I tore it up. The closest I could get to writing would be to work for a writer.

About three weeks passed before I had a reply to my application. It was a letter asking me to come to an address in the

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17ième arrondissement for an interview and was signed "Daphne Woodward." For some reason which I cannot remember I arrived there half an hour late, much to my mortification. Mrs. Woodward told me that the name of the author was Arthur Koestler, that she was his secretary, but was going back to England. To test my shorthand she dictated a passage from *Darkness at Noon*, which I typed out. It was all right, except that I got one word wrong: I wrote 'effix' for 'ethics'. She then said that Mr. Koestler was going to interview some of the applicants at the Hôtel Montalembert in a few days' time; I was to be there at 5 P.M.

After the interview with Daphne Woodward I went to see my Romanian friend to ask him about this author. "Ah, Arthur Koestler . . . ," he said and I could tell from his expression that he was greatly impressed.

I wondered what he looked like. With a name like Arthur, he must be very tall, with a red face. I imagined his study, under the eaves of a house, lined with books and, beside the small window, his writing table with a lamp on it.

The most suitable clothes to wear for the interview would be clerical grey, so I put on my grey coat and skirt, a paler grey pullover and a grey beret. A bus took me from the Right to the Left Bank. As it crossed the Seine, I wondered what the outcome would be and was filled with excitement. I was determined to get the job. I got off the bus in the Boulevard St. Germain and walked to the Hôtel Montalembert. In an effort to make up for having been half an hour late for the first interview I was now half an hour early. I went to the reception desk at the hotel and explained that I had an appointment with Mr. Koestler but was early. I asked which of the two lounges he was in and the receptionist pointed towards a room which led off the entrance lounge. Relieved, I sat down at a table next to the entrance doors to wait.

The room was nearly empty at that hour of the afternoon. I looked at a couple facing me on the far side of the room. The woman was dark and attractive; she looked intense and leaned towards the man, who looked bored. I began to wonder about them. They obviously did not know each other

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well; perhaps he was taking her out for the first time. I thought they were talking English, which made it even more interesting. The woman had an American accent. I became engrossed watching them. After a while one or two words floated across the room—"Melun," "Fontainebleau," "train." I realized with horror that I had been staring at Mr. Koestler while he was interviewing another applicant. In the same moment he became aware of me and called across the room to the reception desk: "*Concierge*"—his voice carried easily—"*est-ce que quelqu'un m'attend?*" The accent was very French.

I got up and went across. "I'm awfully sorry," I said, "I'm early and I thought you were in the other room. I'll go next door and wait."

When the other woman had left it was my turn. I sat down at the table with Mr. Koestler, and saw a tired-looking man with red rings under his eyes. He did not say any polite, reassuring words. He explained that Mrs. Woodward was going to be away for the summer and he needed somebody to take her place. It would be a temporary job. The summer seemed an interminably long time, so I was quite content with this arrangement. His manner was unnervingly direct. All conventionalities were brushed aside; he only said what he meant.

"Do you think you'll be able to do the job?" he asked. "You don't seem to have much self-confidence." I silently agreed with him. I blushed easily, an annoying trait that had afflicted me from the age of seventeen. He asked me if I would like a drink, but I said no. He urged me again, but I was adamant, so he ordered one for himself. He looked displeased. I had done the wrong thing, I could see, but it was too late to change my mind. I always refused hospitality when I was feeling shy. He seemed doubtful whether I would be the right person for the job and decided to try me out for a day. He was driving back to his house at Fontaine-le-Port, near Fontainebleau, the following morning. I was to meet him at the flat of friends and we would drive there together. He would give me some letters to type and decide if I would do.

I went home to the solid, bourgeois Rue Copernic where I lived with my mother. I myself had no doubts about my suita-

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bility for the job. I had a high opinion of my secretarial abilities—in fact I thought I was the best secretary in the whole world.

I spent a sleepless night with a bout of hay fever, and whiled away the time trying to think of topics for conversation on the drive to Fontaine-le-Port. I was in the habit of carrying on endless imaginary dialogues with myself, but these never helped me in everyday life when I most needed them and I remained dumb. I struggled in vain to think of what I could talk about and dismissed every idea as banal.

In the morning, clutching my handkerchief and benzedrine inhaler to keep the hay fever at bay, I went to the flat near the Opéra. Mr. Koestler was there with his friends, Paul Winkler, the head of Opéra Mundi, and his wife. We started at once, but, before leaving Paris, Mr. Koestler had some shopping to do in the Galeries Lafayette, which was nearby. He strode through the shop at great speed, heading for the garden furniture department upstairs, where he asked for two rubber lilos in dark blue. These were produced and he bought them. We charged out of the shop in a matter of minutes and headed for the car.

The sun was shining and the countryside looked like those idyllic paintings I had seen in the Jeu de Paume. I could not think of a single word to say and he remained silent. He drove very fast along those straight, empty French roads, lined with trees sometimes forming a green tunnel. At last I said "This car goes well," and he replied tersely, "It's got good brakes." I wondered vaguely, as one sometimes does, what he would be like in bed; but such a thought seemed beyond any stretch of the imagination.

Before we arrived he told me that he had unexpected guests for lunch—a former girlfriend, Daphne, and her husband. His house, Verte Rive, was set back a little from a narrow road. Trees shaded the gravel drive. As we walked round to the front, I wondered if he had any children. I knew that his wife was away at the time, in England. To my relief, there was no sound of childish voices, only the welcoming bark of his magnificent boxer dog, Sabby, in his outside kennel. The gar-

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den sloped down from the house to a landing stage on the Seine. The river looked wide and peaceful. On the opposite bank the forest stretched endlessly as far as one could see.

In the garden above the landing stage a Canadian canoe lay on the ground keel-side up. Made of wood, with long flowing lines and graceful curves, it seemed to give out a gentle glow in the hot sun. Mr. Koestler frowned as he looked at it. He muttered something about that damn woman letting it lie out there in the sun. I gathered that his housekeeper had committed this offence. Surely, I thought, it would come to no harm in a little sun, not realizing that the wood might shrink, making the canoe leaky. He appeared to be quite enraged and hurried into the house.

Soon the guests came. Daphne had dark eyes with a slightly melancholy expression. Her manner was matter of fact, a little brusque, and she did not hesitate to speak her mind. She was a sculptress. Her husband, Henri Henrion, was an industrial designer, an attractive, likeable person with easy going ways. They had just returned from Italy and the conversation during lunch was all about art—Italian churches, painting and sculpture. The food was brought in by a grumpy old woman dressed in black, called Madame Grandin. We had black pudding, followed by a black stew and a salad of greasy, dark green lettuce leaves. The guests raved about the food, particularly the salad, and Madame Grandin was pronounced a treasure.

After lunch, we climbed into a large rowing boat and Mr. Koestler rowed us across the river to the Forest of Fontainebleau on the other side. We walked through the trees until a clearing was found, spread out rugs and sat down in the shade. Nobody said very much. After a few minutes, Mr. Koestler fell asleep. He lay on his back, his eyes tightly closed, breathing quietly. I did not feel sleepy at all and neither did the Henrions. They asked me questions about myself, where I came from and where I was living in Paris. As quickly as he fell asleep, Mr. Koestler was awake again. We returned to the house and the guests departed for Paris.

Mr. Koestler did not feel much like doing letters. He dug

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a few out of a file and dictated six short, one-sentence replies. His study was on the first floor, his desk by the window, looking onto the Seine. When I had typed them, he read them through and signed them. It had not been much of a test of my abilities. He said so too, and reluctantly decided to take me on. I was to come out by train for two days a week. The next date was arranged and he drove me to the nearby railway station of Fontaine-le-Port. I sat on a bench on the platform, waiting for the train. It was a tiny French country station, deserted, with a row of pollarded trees on each side of the line. From where I sat I could see the bend of the river. The hay-fever bout was worse than ever and frequent sniffing of the benzedrine inhaler did not help much. I felt uneasy about my new job. Mr. Koestler startled me. I did not know what he would say next. Every time he addressed a word to me I nearly jumped out of my skin. But it was only for two months after all. Nevertheless, I began to wish that it was over.

Twice a week I got up early, leaving at about seven o'clock. I travelled by Metro on the Neuilly–Vincennes line to the Gare de Lyons, where I got on a train for Melun. The depressing suburbs rolled by; they had picturesque names like Maisons Alfort (the grimmest) and Villeneuve St Georges. After Brunoy came Combe-la-Ville-Quincy and the landscape began to look like one of those heartbreaking country scenes painted by Pissarro, hazy in the sunlight. The train rattled on endlessly until at last it reached Melun. The wooden benches in the third-class compartments were very hard. At Melun I got into a little local train which criss-crossed the Seine, stopping at Livry, Chartrettes and then Fontaine-le-Port.

Verte Rive was an ugly French villa, but it seemed quite harmless compared with the one next door which belonged to a dentist. Luckily it was not visible from Verte Rive itself, being screened by thick hedges and shrubs. But glimpses from certain vantage points in the garden revealed a monstrous little bright yellow cube which the French in those days would describe as "*très coquette*." Arthur had bought Verte

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Photo: Life/Dmitri Kessel

Arthur and Cynthia at work at Fontaine-Le Port, 1949.

Rive, including its furniture, at the beginning of the year. What appealed to him about it was its proximity to the river with its landing stage, the Forest of Fontainebleau on the opposite shore, and his study on the first floor, overlooking the Seine. It was essential to him to have a good view from his desk while he worked and the flowing current had a soothing effect, he said. The sitting room, with its red matting, gave on to a verandah with tables and chairs, where one could have drinks in the evening, watching the sunset color the river. There was an archway in the sitting room leading into the dining room, in the corner of which was a bar with loops of heavy rope adorning the sides and bar stools trimmed with

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the same rope to give a nautical air. The bar was the source of much amusement to English friends, though some were too horrified by it to be amused. The main guest room was on the ground floor. Upstairs there was Arthur's study, the study of his wife, Mamaine, their bedroom, and two spare bedrooms: I worked in one of them, which was called the Purgatory because of its bright pink walls.

There was plenty of work to be done when I arrived. In the morning I took down replies to letters—letters to publishers, to literary agents, to friends and to readers. In the afternoon I typed them and, when I left about 5 P.M., took them with me to post in Paris.

One day, to my surprise, Arthur asked me to stay on for dinner; he was expecting friends from England who were going to spend the night, and he needed "moral support." I wondered how my presence could possibly give support of any kind. The friends were Hamish Hamilton, the publisher, and his wife, Yvonne, their son, Alastair, an enchanting little boy of eight, and a nanny or governess.

We sat down to an orgiastic meal at the candlelit dining table. Soup, followed by fish and entrée, were brought in by Madame Grandin—that old scarecrow, as Arthur called her. White and red wine were in abundance. The conversation was animated—it seemed like a dream to me, as if I were actually taking part in an exciting novel. The guests were enjoying the kind of food and wine which could not be had in England, where food rationing was even more severe than during the war. After the meat course they began to feel that they could take no more and apologetically explained to their host that they were no longer in training after living in puritan England. At this point Arthur said he would give them something which would miraculously dispel the feeling of overeating; it would burn a passage into their gullets and they would be able to enjoy the rest of the meal. He paused dramatically. It was called, he said, a "*trou Normand*." He then produced four little glasses and filled them up with calvados. He urged everybody to follow his example and swallow the drink in one gulp. The effect would be immediate. It was im-

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possible to resist such gentle persuasion and the guests, no doubt in trepidation, did not try to do so. I am sorry to say that the *trou Normand* had the promised effect only on the host, who alone continued to eat and drink with relish. At the end of dinner (Fontainebleau ice cream and champagne) the Hamiltons quickly retired to bed.

The next morning I was entertained by young Alastair about the prep school he was going to in the autumn, and thereby missed a memorable sight which Arthur has often described:

> After breakfast I asked Jamie Hamilton to try out my single sculler as a hangover remedy. I was very proud of my proficiency as an oarsman and boasted to Jamie that by assiduous training I had brought down the time it took me from Verte Rive to the lock in Samois from thirteen to eleven minutes. He agreed to have a go, went upstairs to change and came down in rowing shorts. This should have made me suspicious—publishers do not usually travel with rowing dress in their luggage. We got into the sculler—I acting as cox—and to my utter mortification he did the stretch in nine minutes without visible effort. But I was somewhat comforted when he confessed that he had once won the Siver Medal for singles at the Olympic Games.

The summer of 1949 was a glorious one and it produced one of the great vintages of wine. In my memory it never seemed to rain; the pale, northern European sun shone, and the visitors to Verte Rive—English, American, Central European, and French—sat around on the landing stage, talking and drinking champagne, which was cooled in the river; they swam in the Seine or took Sabby for walks in the forest. I often heard Arthur speak, during political arguments over dinner, with a passionate clarity which, I fervently felt, could move mountains. My train journeys to Fontaine-le-Port were light-hearted ones, and the return trips to Paris sad. Arthur's Canadian canoe had a sail and he taught himself to sail it with a book in one hand and the other on the rudder.

My Romanian friend asked me if he carried a gun and was surprised to hear that he did not. Surely, he said, there must be an electrified fence round the house. There was none and

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the front gates were always open. But I did notice that when I came into his study after lunch to wake him from his short siesta, he always woke with a start.

The reason for my friend's concern was, of course, that Arthur Koestler had become a very controversial name in France. *Darkness at Noon*, which was first published in England in 1940, was only published by Calmann-Lévy in France, under the title of *Le Zéro et l'Infini*, after the war. The Communists bought up all the copies they could find in bookshops and burned them. Bravely Calmann-Lévy decided to reprint. The result was that, between editions, the book sold at black market prices. It made a tremendous impression, and everybody in France knew about the book and the name of its author. That was why I had to post all the letters in Paris. Nothing was ever posted in the village of Fontaine-le-Port as the clerks at the little post office were said to be members of the Communist party. Only letters to personal friends were typed on writing paper headed with the address. All other letters bore the address, "c/o A. D. Peters", who was Arthur's literary agent.

Arthur often used to play on the gramophone Mozart's Piano Concerto in C Major. Sometimes he would sit alone at night when everybody had gone to bed, playing it over and over again. When I hear the C Major concerto now I feel I am back again in that magical midsummer: the Seine with its smell of *la vase* and Arthur's three boats bobbing up and down on their moorings; hay fever (which is like breathing up water through your nose); the sensation of drinking Pernod for the first time; and knowing that, though this existence would soon be a thing of the past, I did not care and lived only for the moment.

Fontaine-le-Port was in the Brie country. Nearby were le Châtelet-en-Brie and Brie-Comte-Robert, a very pretty village. Alas, all the good Brie went to Paris and only shrivelled old stuff could be found in the region. Arthur was fond of cheese, particularly *chèvre*, and he was quick to notice that there was never any cheese on my plate.

"Have some," he said, pushing the board towards me.

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"I never eat cheese," I said, feeling rather proud of my strange taste.

"Come on," he urged impatiently. "Try it."

"But I don't like it," I replied confidently.

It was a great mistake to say that, because he now became determined to convert me. How could anybody not like cheese? I must try it because he knew I would like it. In the end I had to give in and from then on I always ate cheese. I suffered from this disarming bullying when it came to sausages too, which I used to hate.

One evening in Paris my Romanian friend told me that friends of the poet, Supervielle, had talked about Arthur with him. "Koestler," he said to me sternly, "has a very bad reputation." *I said nothing. Anyway, it was too late.*

He did little writing that summer and I was occupied with typing letters and filing. But one afternoon he read me a couple of pages written on lined manuscript paper. He decided to try dictating them into a new machine called a wire recorder, precursor of the tape recorder, for me to type out. But as he dictated, he wanted to make corrections, which proved to be a fiddly job, upsetting his concentration. In the end he gave up and I took it all down in shorthand. He stuck to this method and another use was found for the wire recorder: it became a sort of guest book, with guests giving their names and making comments—silly, witty, or wise—into the machine.

The work Arthur had started on and which I began typing that afternoon was the beginning of his autobiography, *Arrow in the Blue*. Chapter 1, "The Horoscope," and chapter three, "The Pitfalls of Autobiography," which together amounted to twelve pages, were the only writing he did in July and August. "The Horoscope" describes a visit to *The Times*, where he looked up the issue which appeared on the day of his birth—5 September 1905—in order to cast his "secular horoscope."

During August, Arthur's wife, Mamaine, returned from England. I did not see her in the morning when I arrived. Ar-

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thur dictated a mass of letters in his study. I met her for the first time when I came down to lunch, though I had seen a photograph of her so I knew what she looked like. I sensed in the first moment that Arthur had briefly studied my reaction and that he was proud of her looks. She had pale brown hair which hung down straight onto her shoulders. Her eyes were blue and her nose turned up a little. I could not decide whether I preferred her in profile or not; she had a small oval face and when it was serious she had a slight pout. I was overawed by her perfect French as she gave instructions to Madame Grandin.

She had been very ill in Verte Rive in June, and Arthur had taken her to London for treatment for her asthma. She and Arthur seemed so different. He had an energy which was almost superhuman; he was so quick—if you thought he was going to do something, you discovered that he had done it ten minutes before. She was thin, after her illness, and tired easily. But I saw her come wonderfully to life one Sunday when a crowd of her English friends descended for lunch at Verte Rive. She had a musical ear and was an unerring mimic. I once heard her taking off the Italian-born wife of a friend who was a great chatterbox. Mamaine kept up a flow of chatter, catching every nuance of accent and expression, until we all collapsed with giggles.

She often told me stories of her childhood. Her mother, who was a Paget, had married a Paget. They must have been distant cousins, but they met for the first time while on holiday in Switzerland. She never knew her mother, who died when the twin sisters were born, and her father died when they were only eleven. An uncle, whom she loathed, became their guardian.

On 5 September 1949, I came out to Verte Rive in the late afternoon. The house was in silence when I arrived. I went up the stairs and opened the door of Arthur's study, where he sat at his desk. "Happy birthday," I said. He looked surprised, dashed to the other door and shouted, "Darling, it's my birthday." Mamaine came out of her study and ran across the landing. "O-o-oh, sweetie," she cried, giving him a hug, "it's

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your birthday and I forgot all about it." I was filled with admiration for such a nonchalant attitude to birthdays—the more so when I discovered that Mamaine's was two days later; no doubt that would have been forgotten too.

Mamaine's twin, Celia, came to stay at Verte Rive after a holiday in the Mediterranean. I looked from one twin's face to the other, trying to find a feature which differed slightly, but could find none. Celia was high-spirited, Mamaine was more serious, though this is not to say that they did not change roles sometimes. Celia's slender, sunburned arms looked quite plump compared to Mamaine's. "Celia, you look positively Rubensian," exclaimed Arthur.

The twins spent hours together walking in the Forest of Fontainebleau. I imagined them talking about birds, about music, about their friends (both were extremely loyal and prized friendship above all else), about past loves and about present loves too, for there were quite a few who were hopelessly in love with the twins.

Arthur and Mamaine had been living together for about five years. People who were married that long, I was sure, must be quite bored with each other. This was not the case with them. But in between the long, peaceful and happy times, there were occasional rows.

The first row I witnessed took place during lunch. I can only remember wanting to sink beneath the dining-room table. I could not bear to see them quarreling.

One morning I arrived at Verte Rive to find a blast being turned on me. An important letter had been wrongly addressed and returned to the sender. Arthur produced the envelope. I could see it had not been typed by me and said so. As Arthur went off to find Mamaine and vent his feelings on her, I realized what I had done. I should have taken the blame—how could I have been such an idiot? But Mamaine did not hold it against me.

After the sybaritic summer, Arthur went on a diet for the first time in his life. This made work all but impossible. The hours dragged by and he kept glancing at his watch with a

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Photo: Ergy Landau

Photo: Life/Pat English

Top: Arthur and Cynthia sailing in Arthur's Canadian canoe.
Bottom: Arthur and Mamaine playing chess at Bwlch Ocyn, 1947.

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woeful, half-guilty smile. I could not help laughing at him and he liked being mocked. On a beautiful sunny day he declared we should all have a treat and go on a picnic. We climbed into the boat and headed up river. On a grassy bank we unpacked the picnic. Mamaine and I had some terrine, chunks of bread and *cantal*—the sort of French food which tastes so delicious when you eat it out of doors. Arthur's lunch, according to the diet, consisted of radishes. There was not even any butter to go with them and he was particularly fond of that cheap, prix fixe hors d'oeuvre, *radis au beurre*. He looked at the radishes and frowned. Were they supposed to be for him? He turned to Mamaine and gazed at her accusingly. The countryside looked golden in the sunlight and the birds were singing to split their throats. "But how on earth can you expect one to eat nothing but a lot of radishes!" he cried in exasperation. We ate our picnic and rowed back to Verte Rive in gloomy silence. The rows always seemed to be on trivial matters and my sympathies were always with Mamaine. Paradoxical as it may seem, this in no way changed my feelings toward Arthur.

* * *

Autumn descended on Verte Rive. The days were drawing in, and as the sun set the mist would rise over the river.

Madame Grandin, the old cook, was replaced by a Polish couple. One stormy night in 1949 a car slowly came to a standstill at the front gates, its headlights shining in the darkness. Then it moved on. The Polish couple had been frightened by rumors in the village that Verte Rive was being watched by the Communists and that it was unsafe. The episode with the car was the last straw and they gave notice.

Their place was taken by a French couple, Maxim and Anna. Maxim came from Nevers on the Loire. He would collect snails in the countryside around the house and subject them to the usual revolting treatment which is practiced in France before they can be cooked. His *escargots* were the best in the world. He had a daily allowance of four litres of rough

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country wine—"Château Maxim," Arthur called it. He adored Arthur.

In the mornings I now left home in the dark, and Maxim picked me up in Melun in Arthur's black Citroën. In the evening he would drive me to the station in Fontaine-le-Port to catch the train back to Paris. Often we missed the train. Maxim would draw up at the little station just as it was pulling out. This did not bother him; we would race the train to the next station. Chartrettes. He would be in the right mood for it, too, having downed a few glasses of his famous wine before leaving. On the straight stretches Maxim drove hard, the train running effortlessly beside us; then it disappeared into a little tunnel and we swerved round a few bends. The sun was setting and its color was reflected in his ruddy, good-natured face. It was good sport and he beamed with pleasure. We arrived at Chartrettes; Maxim braked hard and I was ready to get out and make a dash for it. But no—again we had missed the train by a hair's breadth. Sometimes this chase would go on all the way to Melun, but we always caught up with the train in the end.

Arthur settled down to writing again. There was peace in the house. He put aside the autobiography which he had begun in the summer. The new book was *The Age of Longing*. Every week I came out to Fontaine-le-Port and typed a new installment. I could hardly wait for the next one. It reminded me of my childhood when every Thursday my father used to bring home my favorite comics—*Tiger Tim*, *Bubbles*, and *Puck*. In no time I had read them all and then had to wait another whole long week to see, for instance, whether Pat the Pirate would have to walk the plank. But now I was wondering what would happen to Fedya and Hydie. Whilst waiting for the next instalment I used to dream about them. In chapter seven—"Calf's Head and Champagne"—they dined together for the first time. Soon after typing this chapter, I saw Arthur's manuscript book lying open on his desk. My eye caught the heading at the top of a page: "Love in the Afternoon," and before I could stop myself I had read the first sentence: "Wait," cried Hydie, "wait! You are tearing

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my blouse to pieces." Though these two chapters were written consecutively, that is not how they appear in the novel. I was kept in suspense for a long time and was only given "Love in the Afternoon" to type in its proper order, which turned out to be a hundred pages after Fedya had first taken Hydie out to dinner.

Daphne Woodward intended to return to Paris at the beginning of September, but Arthur had a letter from her to say she had been held up for another month. When she did come back, it was decided that I should stay on as Arthur's secretary. She had a busy life and could not manage to put in the amount of time that Arthur required. I was overjoyed—if only life would go on like this for ever!

My mother decided to leave Paris and go to Vienna. I took a room in the 17ième arrondissement at the apartment of a Madame de Faudoaz. Arthur nicknamed her Madame de Foutaise. His French was colorful with a generous use of argot. Madame de Faudoaz disapproved of slang and I was constantly corrected when, in my efforts to express myself, I used it. Arthur would come bounding down the stairs at lunchtime, saying, "*Qu'est-ce qu'on bouffe aujourd'hui?*" *Bouffe*—that was an unusual word. I had never heard it before. I would try it out on Madame Faudoaz. She would no doubt be impressed by my flair for French. But it was met with gasps of horror and that word was never again used under her roof.

There was a file in Arthur's desk drawer which I had not seen before. It was blue and written on the cover was the word "Divorce." Arthur explained that he and Mamaine were not really married because he and his former wife, Dorothy, had not yet got their divorce. But he expected it to come through soon and while he was dictating a letter to the lawyer who was handling it, Mamaine came into the room. Her face fell when she saw the secret file out on the desk, but Arthur reassured her. Cynthia had to know sooner or later, he said.

On the day of the wedding Arthur and Mamaine came up to Paris. They intended to return to Verte Rive in the late af-

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ternoon, and Arthur told me to meet them at the Café Flore at drink time so that I could get a lift out with them. He was keen to get back to work early the next morning.

The black Citroën was parked in the Boulevard St. Germain just outside the Café Flore. Arthur and Mamaine were sitting on the terrace outside with some other people, including Stephen Spender—who had a boyish face, curly blond hair and a diffident manner. As we sat drinking, Arthur noticed a scruffy, shabbily dressed man and brought him to our table. It turned out that he was a former comrade of Arthur's in his Communist cell in Berlin at the beginning of the thirties. He told Arthur the story of how he fell into the hands of the Gestapo and was tortured by them and made to eat his own excrement. Arthur did not really seem to like the man (I think he was still a member of the Party), but these ghastly stories seemed to stir up old memories. He kept offering his former comrade drinks and knocked back quite a few himself.

It was getting late and eventually, to everyone's relief, the German left. It was decided that we should drive back to Verte Rive after dinner. In the restaurant there was a second unpleasant incident. One of the guests—a man who had tagged along with his wife and whom Arthur had never met before—thought that Arthur had been rude to him. It all happened suddenly and, for a moment, it looked as it there might be a fight, but the couple departed, leaving Arthur looking somewhat bewildered.

In my memory the evening ended when Mamaine refused to let Arthur drive. He sat at the wheel of the black Citroën and, when Mamaine refused to get into the car, he slammed the door. The last we saw of him he was hurtling away into the night alone. Mamaine and I were left with Stephen Spender. It was too late for me to go home, for the bar across the front door of the apartment was put up at eleven. Stephen Spender offered Mamaine the spare room in his flat and I slept on the sofa in his sitting room.

Early next morning I made my way out to Fontaine-le-Port. Arthur looked pale and asked where Mamaine was. I told him

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where we had spent the night. Why doesn't she telephone me, he kept asking guiltily.

The wedding night had hardly been a conventional one, but I thought nothing of it. For Arthur and Mamaine, weddings, like birthdays, were simply not celebrated. A few days later, when Maxim picked me up at the station at Melun, he was beaming. "*Monsieur et Madame sont mariés*," said he in his homely Nivernais accent. I looked noncommittal but was in fact horrified. How had the secret got out? Maxim proudly produced some French newspaper with their photograph spread across the page.

An enormous cupboard in Verte Rive was filled with the files Arthur had accumulated in the last ten years, since he escaped from France in 1940 and settled in England. I was given the task of arranging them in more or less chronological order, or by subject and putting them into file storage cases. On the spines of these cases I wrote what was contained in them and today I still see that familiar, unformed handwriting.

I sat on the bed in the Purgatory, with its Schiaparelli-pink walls, surrounded by old files. One file haunted me. It was called simply "Jews" and contained snapshots, rather blurred, of concentration camp victims; some were of thin, skeleton-like figures standing to attention, waiting to be shot.

There were endless correspondence files. Most letters were filed away—one might need to refer to them some time—and once filed, stayed there for ever, for the job of weeding them out would have been too time-consuming.

He was conscientous about answering fan mail. Here is a letter to a little boy in Africa, who had asked Arthur if he would be his penfriend:

Dear Ebenezer,
It was very kind of you to write to me. I am sending you enclosed a picture and hope you will like it. If you want other pen friends you could write to:

Mr. Kingsley Martin
10 Great Turnstile
London WC1

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and to: Mr. Andre Malraux
19 bis, Avenue Victor Hugo
Boulogne s/Seine
France

They both like coconuts and are very nice people. Many good wishes to you and your friends.

At the end of May 1950, Arthur finished the first draft of *The Age of Longing*. He wrote it by hand; every time I came out, he dictated to me the pages he had written, making corrections as he went along. He then read through the pages I had just typed out, making a few further corrections and putting a wavy line under passages he was doubtful about. He now began to read through the whole book, making the final corrections and sometimes using scissors and paste. He expected this to take him two months. The first typed draft had to be retyped and there were always plenty of pages waiting for me whenever I was there.

From the middle of June, most of his time was occupied with preparations for the Congress for Cultural Freedom, which he and Mamaine were to attend at the end of the month. He thought that the congress should end with the issuing of a manifesto on intellectual freedom, which he dictated to me. Normally when he dictated letters, he would pause frequently, trying to find the right words and sometimes ending a sentence as if it were a question—will that do, he seemed to be wondering. But now he seemed sure of what he wanted to say as he walked up and down the room. He won't need to make any corrections, I thought; the style was simple and clear. Sentences like "Deprived of the right to say 'no,' man becomes a slave " stuck in my head.

On the day before Arthur and Mamaine left for Berlin, I was at Verte Rive typing last-minute letters, as Arthur wanted to clear the decks. The following morning the three of us drove up to Paris. On the journey, Arthur gave me instructions about things to be attended to in his absence. And, he said, if anything were to happen to Mamaine and him, I was to send the typescript of *The Age of Longing* to A. D. Peters

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in London. A. D. Peters was his literary agent and an old friend.

Over the next twenty-four hours I could hardly bear to look at a newspaper. To reach Berlin, Arthur and Mamaine had to fly over part of East Germany. Supposing someone were to take a pot shot at their plane. I tried to push such melodramatic thoughts out of my mind.

A few days later, the Korean War began and I was assailed with new fears. It was the beginning of the Third World War, I was sure; its shadow, which looms over *The Age of Longing*, was about to become reality, and Arthur and Mamaine would be trapped in Berlin. They were supposed to be away for just a week. Three more days passed and there was no sign of them. But at last my gloom was dispelled by a telephone call: they were home.

The summer was at its height. Outside the sun blazed and the Seine seemed to beckon, but we sat indoors working. As I typed the last lines of *The Age of Longing* I was filled with melancholy. For Arthur it was much more. His vitality seemed to have ebbed away. He was subdued, almost apologetic.

* * *

When, at the end of September 1950, Arthur went to New York, he did not know how long he would be away. Mamaine was going to stay in London with Celia and join him later. I decided, sadly, to go to London too and find another job. Verte Rive and the dogs were to be looked after by Maxim and Anna.

When Arthur left, I existed somehow. In the morning I got up; at night I went to bed and cared not whether I slept or did not sleep. I was conscious only of a pain in my heart which seemed to radiate to my lungs, stomach, and liver. Could a heartache be experienced not only in a figurative sense but literally as well? After a while, a boil appeared under my arm. I took the Métro to the American Hospital at Neuilly to have it lanced. The tiny scar reminds me of my sickness of the heart.

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On arriving in London I found myself a job and a place to live. The latter was a little mews house behind Sloane Street, which I shared with two other girls.

In November Mamaine came to see our house. Arthur, she said, had just bought a whole island in the Delaware river with a farmhouse on it. Although I had wondered whether I would ever see him again, this news depressed me; now that he had his island, he would never come back to Europe. At the end of December Mamaine left, too, to join Arthur.

On a dreary morning in February, as I was leaving home to go to work, I found a letter addressed to me on the hall carpet. It had an American stamp and as I hurried to the bus stop I opened it and read:

This letter will be a big surprise. Mamaine and I have made up our minds to ask you whether you would like to come over and stay with us until we go back to Europe which, if all goes well, should be some time in April.

Of course this offer is not entirely unselfish. Out here where we live it is as impossible to find an efficient and nice secretary as in Fontaine-le-Port. I have now got seriously going on the autobiography and with your help I could have most of it done in a couple of months by dictating straight into shorthand. This being a nonfiction book it could be done the same way as letters and political pamphlets, but there is nobody else whom I am so accustomed to working with.

There followed a few paragraphs about the technicalities of the journey, air ticket, and so on, and it ended: "Well I told you this would be a surprising letter. We very much hope that you like the idea and that, as the work is pressing, you will arrive yesterday."

That evening I replied:

Dear Mamaine and Arthur,

This is all too wonderful for words. I JUST SIMPLY CAN'T BELIEVE IT! I have been so excited ever since I received your letter this morning and leaping round the streets like a mad thing—no wonder I notice people looking at me queerly! But, apart from my job, I shall try not to be a bother to you.

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I realize that the sooner I come the sooner you will be able to get on with the book, so I am really getting down to things in a hurry. I went at lunch-time today to the Consulate to find out what I need. . . .

There were a lot of things to do and it took ten days to get my visitor's visa. At the American Consulate they looked solemn when I explained that the purpose of my journey was to work for Arthur Koestler and I had to swear that I was neither a Communist nor a Fascist. I would have sworn to anything.

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NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

FICTION

Linda Ashour, a native Oklahoman, lives in Rabbit Valley, St. Paul de Vence, France, with her husband and two children. She is working on a collection of short stories.

Michael Brownstein is the author of nine books of poetry and fiction, including the novel *Country Cousins*. His most recent book is *Oracle Night: A Love Poem* (Sun & Moon Press). He now lives in New York City.

E. L. Doctorow's "The Leather Man" will be included in a volume of short fiction, *Lives of the Poets*, forthcoming from Random House.

Janet Kauffman is the author of *Places In The World A Woman Could Walk*, published by Knopf in 1984. She lives in Hudson, Michigan.

Ron Padgett's most recently published work is a translation of *The Poet Assassinated And Other Stories*, by Guillaume Apollinaire (North Point Press). He is currently the Director of Publications at Teachers & Writers Collaborative in New York City.

POETRY

Ingeborg Bachmann was born in Austria in 1926 and died in 1973. Bachmann lived largely in Rome. She is widely considered to be the leading German-language poet of her generation. Her translator, **Mark Anderson**, is a doctoral candidate in Comparative Literature at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore.

Yves Bonnefoy lives in Paris, where he holds the chair of poetics at the Collège de France. "The Clouds" is from his most recent book, *Dans le leurre du seuil*. His translator, the poet **Richard Pevear**, lives in New York. His translation of Bonnefoy's *Dans le leurre du seuil* and *Pierre Ecrite* will be published by Random House in 1985.

Dino Campana was born in Marradi, Italy, in 1885. In 1919, Campana was committed to an insane asylum, where he died in 1932. "The Night" is a major constituent of his book *Canti Orfici* (Orphic Songs). **Charles Wright**'s selection from Campana's *Orphic Songs* will be published this fall in the Field Translation Series. Wright teaches at the University of Virginia.

Philip Levine has published numerous volumes of poetry, including *7 Years From Somewhere*, which won the National Book Critics Award, and *Ashes*, which won both the National Book Critics Award and the National Book Award. He was born in Detroit, Michigan, in 1928, and, "after a succession of stupid jobs," settled in Fresno, California.

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Eugenio Montale was a Nobel Prize-winning poet. The poems that appear in this issue are taken from his last book, *Altri versi*, which was published in 1981, shortly before his death. **Jonathan Galassi**'s translations will appear in *Otherwise: Last and First Poems of Eugenio Montale*, which Random House will publish this fall. Galassi also edited and translated Montale's selected essays, *The Second Life of Art* (Ecco Press), published in 1982.
Claude Mouchard was one of the founders of the leading review, *Po&sie*. "Black Animal Dependency," which first appeared in the magazine *Critique*, was included in *Perdre*. He lives in Paris. His translator, **Linda Orr**, is a poet and critic who teaches in the French Department at Duke University.

INTERVIEWS

Duncan Fallowell is a journalist and writer currently working in France on a novel. He regularly contributes profiles to *The Times* of London and *Time Out*.
Shusha Guppy is the London editor of *The Paris Review* and a regular contributor to the *Daily Telegraph*, British *Vogue*, and other periodicals. Also a singer, she recently released an album of English poetry set to music entitled "Durable Fire."
Christian Salmon is a researcher at the National Center for Scientific Research in Paris. **Dinah Louda**, the translator of the Kundera interview, is a graduate student in political science at Harvard University and a freelance journalist. **Aaron Asher**, Milan Kundera's editor at Harper & Row, contributed greatly to the final version of this interview.

FEATURE

Cynthia Koestler was Arthur Koestler's personal secretary for sixteen years before marrying him in 1965. She took her own life in 1983 at the age of fifty-five in a suicide pact with her husband. To the end of her life, she used her maiden name, Cynthia Jeffries, when signing letters as "Secretary to Arthur Koestler." Her contribution to *Stranger on the Square* is her first writing to be published. **Harold Harris** is the former Editorial Director of Hutchinson of London. He was Arthur Koestler's editor and personal friend for over twenty years, and is now the literary executor of the Koestler estate.

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ART

Louise Bourgeois was born in Paris in 1911, and lives in New York. Major exhibitions of her paintings, sculpture, and drawings have been held recently at The Museum of Modern Art, New York; Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago; Contemporary Art Museum, Houston; and Robert Miller Gallery, New York.

Mark Kostabi was born in Whittier, California, in 1960, and lives in New York. His paintings and drawings have been exhibited at Limbo Lounge, New York; P.S.1, Long Island City, New York; and Semaphore Gallery, New York.

Doug Lindsay was born in 1954 and lives in Hilo, Hawaii. His paintings and drawings have been shown at the Honolulu Academy of Arts; Hilo Center, Hawaii; and Fashion Moda, New York.

Susan Rothenberg was born in Buffalo, New York, in 1945, and currently lives in New York. Recent exhibitions of her paintings have been held at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art; Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam; and Willard Gallery, New York.

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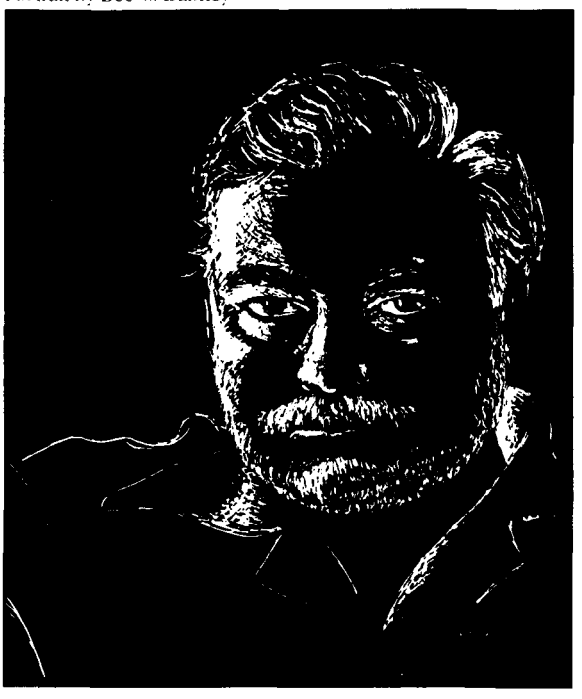
Portrait by Bee W. Dabney



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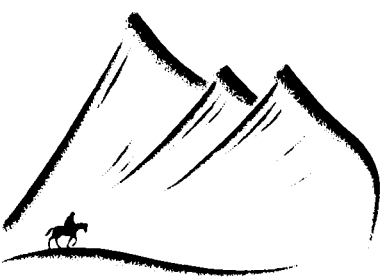

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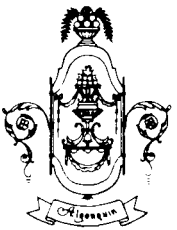

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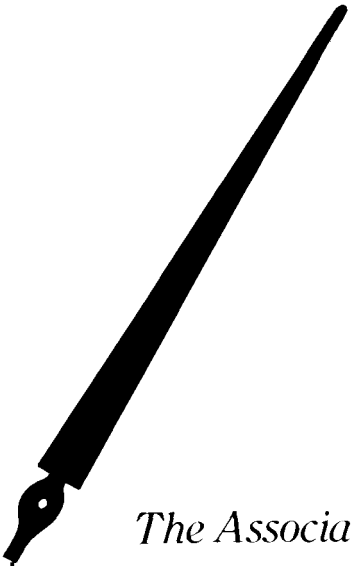

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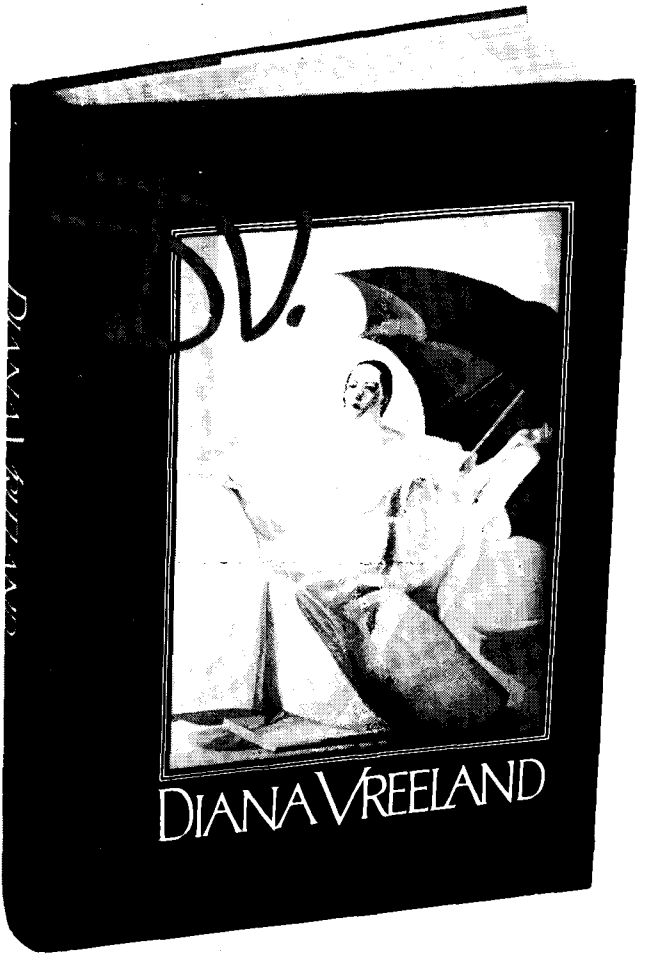

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